

THEATRE AUSTRALIA

Australia's magazine of the performing arts

December 1977 \$1.95

# Theatre Australia

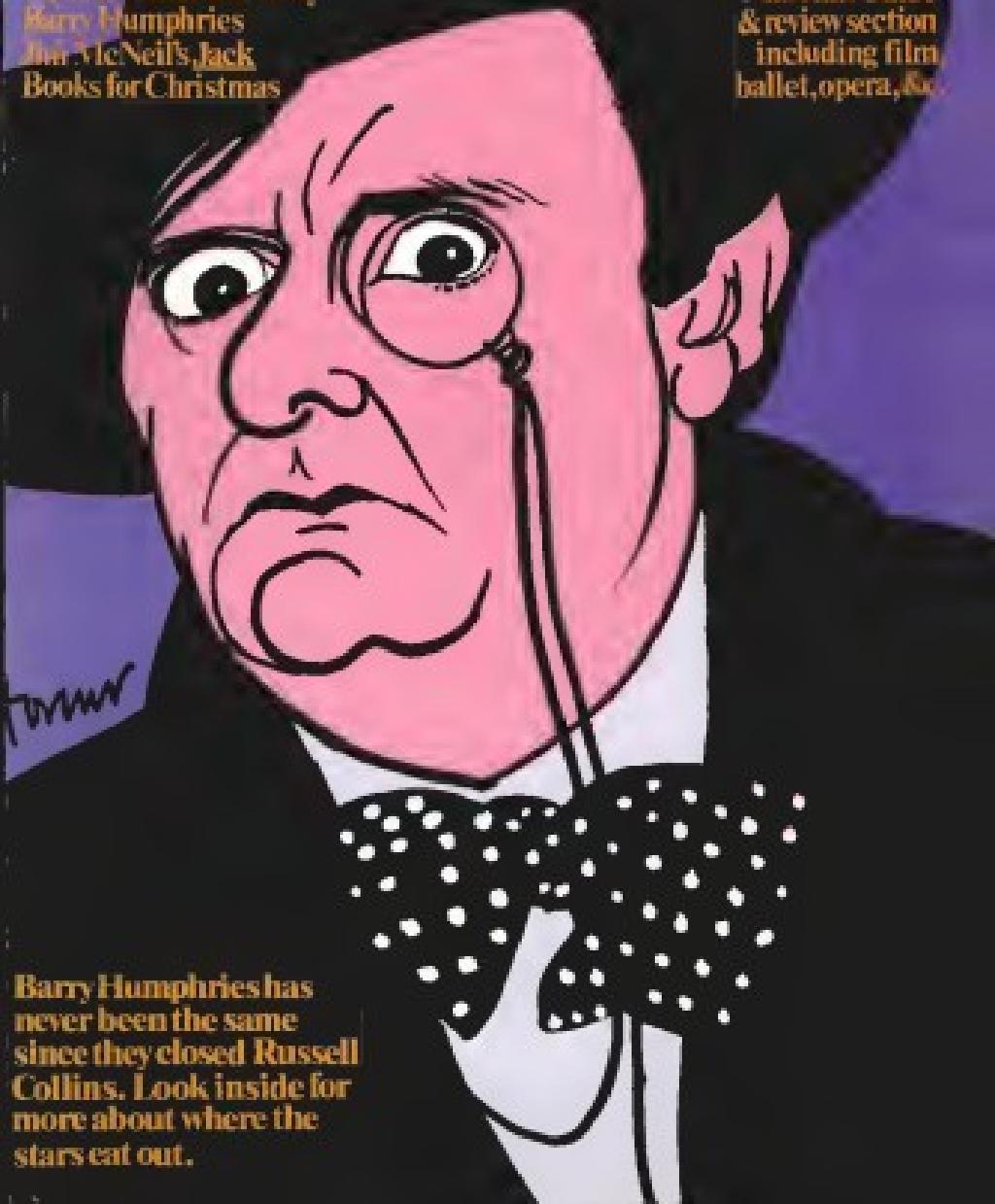
Stars of musical comedy

Barry Humphries

Jim McNeil's Jack

Books for Christmas

National Guide  
& review section  
including film,  
ballet, opera, &c.



Barry Humphries has  
never been the same  
since they closed Russell  
Collins. Look inside for  
more about where the  
stars eat out.

# NIMROD

Nimrod Theatre  
500 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills Sydney 2010

Saturday 3 December – Sunday 8 January  
Numbered Upstairs

Thursday 12 – Saturday 28 January  
Canberra Repertory Theatre

Tuesday 7 February – Saturday 4 March  
Theatre Royal Sydney

and thereafter on tour through New South Wales country towns and to Brisbane

# THE CLUB

by David Williamson  
directed by John Bell  
designed by Tom Bartermann  
Jeff Astley, Drew Forsythe, Ron Graham, Ron Haddrick, Ivar Kantis, Barry Lovett  
David Williamson lets the lid off the back room politics: the buying and selling, the backstabbing and backdooring that regulate the life of a suburban football club

from Saturday 14 January  
Numbered Upstairs

## Rock-ola

The Last Post Hiroshima Romance  
by Tim Canning  
Directed by Richard Wherrett  
Designed by Brian Thomson  
Terry Llewellyn Jones, Kris McQuade, Robin Ramsey, Joelle Woerner  
This world premiere production tours to Adelphi Festival of Arts at the Scott Theatre from 6 March

from Tuesday 3 January  
Clark Island on Sydney Harbour  
R. L. Stevenson's

## Treasure Island

adapted and directed by Ken Hocker  
Designer Larry Eastwood  
Robert Alexander, Allan Beecroft, Steven Brusick, Bill Charlton, Robert Davis, Ron Hackett, Bob Hornsey, Tony Ingemant, Malcolm Keith, Bob Massa, Dennis Scott, Rod Wilkins.  
Sponsored by the Festival of Sydney

"The best and most original show on tour — The Sun

from Saturday 28 January  
Number Downstairs

## Everyman

by Redi Krausmann

## Stubble and Marxisms

by Moya Henderson  
Directed by John Bell  
a double bill of new experimental Australian work

from Thursday 2 February  
Mayfair Theatre London

## Gordon Chater

## The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin

by Steve J. Sperber  
Directed by Richard Wherrett  
Designed by Larry Eastwood  
Over 375 Performances  
Presented in London by Backstage Productions and Dorothy Hemmings



## Theatre

December 1971  
Volume 2, Number 9

## Australia

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# COMMENT

The best theater is created when a great play is performed by great actors under a great director, set prominently in a great theatre building. A recent production rose to such heights, and in doing so dredged up from the depths the question of whether this country should have a national theater. The actors were our own, play and director were not, but it was proven that given a great text, in this case Garcia's *Laura Doyle*, and a good director, here Leon Collet (we have our own, though perhaps not yet so far lagged), performers here can show themselves to tour a greatness which "one contingent chance" has a while obscured.

What Collet brought here more than his talent was an idea which commanded reverence. Could a national theater, demanding by its very nature constant relevance, create such an aura and clear a sky of its own making to allow our glories to shine forth continually? Harry Kuppan once noted we "have pretensions of grandeur" as being "not that it is after third rate — it isn't — but that it is very nearly first rate". Could an institution, which is sick and miserably going fully formed from a host of amateur government endowment agencies and exceed the theatre community to attain such a standard? The work of Collet, and Collette before him, suggests it could. Surrounded for instance, John Bell with a cloak of reverence and given here the means to present the "largesse" of great plays and who can doubt the result?

The question has a negative side of relevance at the moment. The Trust, now faced with the responsibility for negotiating such a theatre, has just had its orchestra stripped from its bosom. Now, with a dissolved lattice of poly it must prove its ability to tackle entrepreneurial necessity or be cut all together. It was Hugh Keay, meanwhile director of the AETT who came down the mountain with the tablet inscribed with a message of the newsletter in 1980/81. He looked down at Sydney as the promised city, "the great history of the Commonwealth", and possessing the largest population, and he dreamt a dream, in 1980, of the temple "to house such an ideal" as being the Opera House, this still rising from the waters of the harbour.

But he reckoned without the drama stage long relegated to a dark appendage built under this strong editor to the per-

forming arts, in a crypt which Kuppan again described in our own listing as a "home for a permanent company". In alone a cause de culture seriously Moyle failed to recognise (or did the tribe of our theorized local) would diverge even more, each chasing its own goddes cult and that the stone would break the green tablets asunder.

And Moyle left the land of Lot and could not look back for fear of turning into a pillar of salt.

Can the different tongues ever speak with one voice? Perhaps Herrmanns, the new chairman of the AG, will try and for making the Opera company truly national, will show the way. After all it took the Sun King to give France its Comedie Francaise, England finally achieved a national theatre as a company in 1963, and as a building in 1970, and America (assisted with some geographical diversity) has never really had one. So, we are more like Germany with its many city states, everyone as treated in seeking subsidy for the materials with the inevitable irony that entails. Thus federal control which could bring forth a national reputation is still only a far-off dream and a logistic nightmare.

From the subtext to the consciousness, the land of Oz is proving once again that the Americans haven't got a world patent on the image required for national theatre and rock opera. John Allen (editor of *Ex* a predecessor *Margaret*) back in 1968 wrote "a good enough reason Ned Kelly might one day ride a long way if we can begin to think of an indigenous theatre as wider items than just the intellectual elite". The Adelaide Festival Trust seems to think too in backing that grand vision of the drag superstar, Ray Lovelace, to the tune of a quarter of a million dollars for his material, *an Australian's most famous bushranger*. And there is to be a simultaneous take-off from both Sydney and Melbourne (*Neurotic and Neurotic*) of Tim Goddard's vision of the *Kirkman* flight that was the sun, Rock 'n' Roll.

With those last chapters things look well for an exciting year in 1981, which I look forward to covering. Best wishes and thanks to all those who have kept us flying despite the odd patches of turbulence—our honoured readers, our devoted contributors and the many voluntary crew.

## Theatre Australia

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# QUOTE & QUERIES

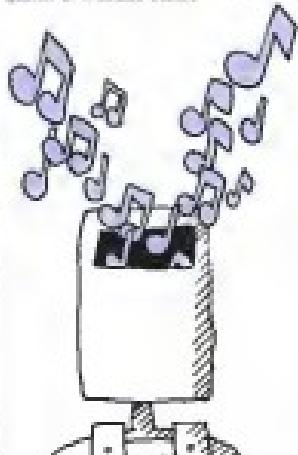


Cover illustration of Barry Humphries drawn for Theatre Australia by Arthur Horner

## EXCITEMENT FOR EVERYONE

**REG LIFEMORE** of the Ned Kelly musical (Music, Patrick Flynn, Musical Director, Michael Caruso) which he is to direct and design, and which he has also written:

"It's going to be the biggest thing that has happened in Australian theatre and it certainly is the biggest stage production ever launched in Australia, with a budget of a quarter of a million dollars."



"I wrote it while on tour with Alan in Perth and Adelaide four years ago, but have been working on it ever since, apart from a few changes, though the story still sticks to the historical events. To me it is a great adventure story, a grown-up game of cowboys and Indians, goodies and baddies.

"It runs about two hours of pretty basic material, leading like an expressionist to a traditional climax. Excitement! For everyone with every possible musical ingredient — rock opera, opera, burlesque, vaudeville comedy — everything bush-tong and stone will be in trap in itself!"

The varied staging will have much to do with Patrick Flynn's music and my response to it. The state has a particular authority, it can be vulgar variety and raucous, often boozing in malady and has a good rock house.

"I have designed an environment in which it all happens and I intend to lavish the same care on *Ned Kelly* as I have given to my own shows *Betty Blue & Yellow* and *Wander Woman*."

## NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF

**JOHN GADDE**: "I spent two months in New York working at NYU University with Rowena Balas and going to other classes. It was a wonderful broadening of experience. It is a place where there is intense pressure on everyone, including students, to succeed and produce the goods. It's a good thing in many ways. New York theatre is certainly very exciting, but by the same token that pressure can lead to some shallowness. There's no reluctance to everything's very sentimental, mostly very good, but it would be nice to see some more risky things going on."

"I went to the theatre every night in New York and the six weeks I was in London — probably too much — and I was very impressed by what I saw. Australia certainly has nothing to be ashamed of! In Britain there is a tremendous concentration on style and polish, and some productions get polished out of existence. The approach in America is very different, there's lots of polish at moments, but the classic and straight theatre often looks firm and structured. We fall somewhere between the two, a terrific energy that breaks through the polish."

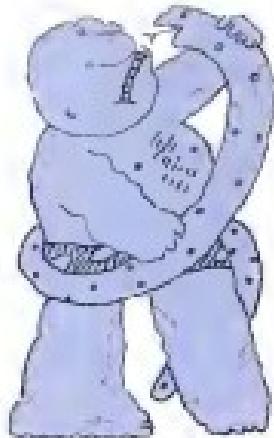
"I was very homesick for all sorts of reasons, and it really is good to know that I am deeply Australian and this is where I want to work. We are a very different people, especially to the British. England was the most foreign place I went to. It's

wonderful to see the way other people work, but also to have our work validated. Our playwrights are just as exciting as the American and English ones. I'm very much looking forward to working in the Tide/Seymour Centre season with Crimphony and Shatwell, Dorothy Howell writing me a part in her new play *Pandora's Box* and I will be playing the Tom Courtney (whom I met in NY) part in *Reed's The Fox*."

## TASMANIA'S LUCKY DAY!

**TIM GRIMMING**, "The Abounding Optimism" open at Hobart's Theatre Royal on November 11th. The one and only Eric O'Rourke, unemployed pedal pusher, donkey boy says: "Forget the New Depression and let me entertain you in the Abounding Optimism, make an attempt on the world record for optimism."

"Say! Mr Hercules, strong man performing battle in deadly Queensland to give



to the death! Hear! Miss Tammy Dahlby, flax and flaxia representative and country and western entertainer's assistant, as she tells her life story and especially how she found God."

"Say! Handsome Dale Lamington, over-handsome man playing piano today, perfumes his renowned dance of the towels. Hear! The Grand Dame of Agency Colonists Ms Connie Whiff relays the cost. Mr Hercules behind the dressing room."

# "?" QUOTES & QUERIES "?

"A director and para will be in audience every performance."

Tony says: See it, and your life will never be the same. My chance meeting with the Tasmanian Theatre Company director was Tasmania's lucky day."

## DIRECTOR'S DIRECTOR

**JOHN BELL:** "Basically working with Leon Cade is one of the most interesting and really enjoyable things I've done in the theatre. I believe he's a great director who understands a great deal about acting techniques and knows how to approach an otherwise problematical play. There aren't many directors who know these things

directors, and I include myself, ask enough of actors all the time. In Australia we are too insistent in demanding more of actors. Action say they like to be stretched, but few really like it when it happens to them. This shouldn't be considered by a director. I admire his unfailingly cool, calm, almost patient, nothing has you rattled here. He's a flying situation and has a house out after staying up for the last two nights and then they're in the morning with the lighting. This is exemplary, no other director could be plainer or solider. It is very characteristic to a cool and set a director flying, he gets no sympathy and it worries the actors."

"As a man I like him very much, he is kind, generous and strong-minded. He is not unnecessarily modest about his achievements, but very consider about his failures."

## CONTINUING QUEST FOR MINIMUS

**TERRY O'CONNELL:** "We too are in the lookout for original scripts for next year. We would be most interested to receive any previously unperformed scripts, especially originals with small casts, that anyone would like to send us. We are currently planning the first half of our season next year and would like most of the acquisitions to consist of new works. I can't guarantee that all scripts sent to us will be read unconditionally, but we do our best to read them as promptly as we can." (Reserve Trucking Company, PO Box 344, Wagga 2650.)

something's wrong with a performance, but they can't define what it is, so tell the actor how to correct it. Cain is a very good and experienced actor himself, he acts in his theater at Beaumaris in major roles.

"He knows. The Larvae Deaths very well, that is his fifth production so he knows very well what he wants. His first production was in 1968 with the atmosphere of a concentration camp, the last review one was in 1973 in Beaumaris and was a much more philosophical approach to the play and a much more personal statement by the director. His understanding and appreciation of the play has developed, he knows so well what he wants that he can give us a great deal of his understanding in Beaumaris. But he is not trying to tell us down to his interpretation. As far as we were doing a very legal blocking and re-staging of the old production, he saw it, his developed into a far more personal consideration by the actors.

"Lloyd Cain does a very hard, he is a very demanding director. Not enough

## Letters

In your August issue "Quotes and Queries" invited "Equity for Sportspersons", Dave Sennett, Queensland Divisional Secretary of the Australian Sports Industry made some quite remarkable entitling as to why Equity membership of Thorne, Gillen, Marsh & Co. "What nonsense". That Dave should regard Thorne's membership or non-membership as a "life or death" matter for Equity I find mind-boggling.

The use of "personalism" in television commercials is a fact of life. Equity policy currently is that we do not want its members being given a share in performing rights. I am disturbed that Thorne Australia should publish such items and suggest that you check with the office or our Melbourne office whereby our policies will be accounted for myself.

For the record, Equity is not struggling to find funds to stay open, as Dave is quoted. Finally, I loved Dave's reference (announced me of Bob Dylan as "Southern Equity". The fact is that S.E. and Victorian members have heavily subsidized the operation of our Queensland Division for the past 12 years.

Bob Macdonald,  
General Secretary.

Would you be kind enough to tell me where aspiring playwrights can get details of the National Playwrights' Conference? Hopefully, if there is one to be held this year, I would like to be part of it, but do not know what type of plays would be acceptable or where to send them.

I look forward to your magazine. Long may it flourish. But what has happened to the latest page - doesn't anyone write to you? The list of a magazine shown in my correspondence. Not beautifully worded pleasurable exchanges from lofty heights, but a lively forum of comment and opinion from all and sundry, amateur as well as professional, from people who go to the theatre as well as people who make their living from it.

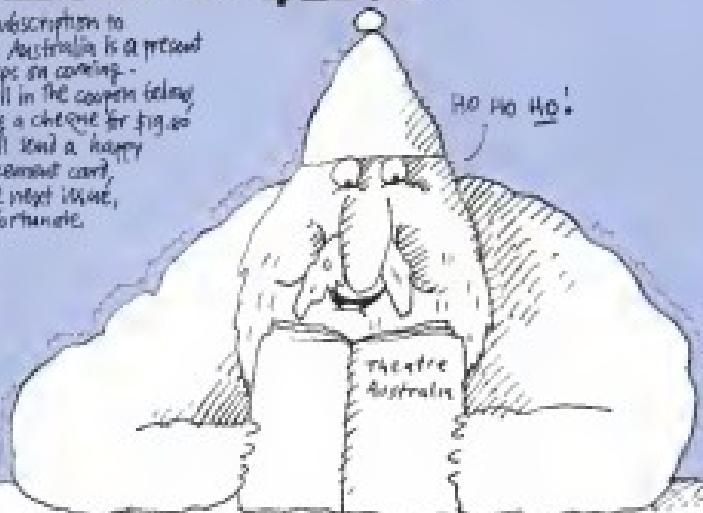
Thank you for an excellent magazine - and for the above information if you can supply it.

Mary Smith  
Austral, Vic.

Script for the 1978 Playwrights' Conference should be submitted to the Chairman of the Playreading Committee, ANPC, 152 Dowling Street, Port Pirie, NSW 5700 as soon as possible. Any script will be considered.

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Merry Christmas.



## Books for Christmas

The trouble with coffee table books is that you never know where to put them. Not having the sort of home that has entrance halls in which people sit and wait, I usually put mine in the bathroom, on the principle that around the coffee table people will want to talk rather than read. Then there are a number of books you will have to decide where to put, or you can set them as Christmas presents for people with very specific tastes, or alternatively with absurdly catholic ones.

*The Paint of Janusz Mazzoni* (by Clive Hanchett, LSP Books, 1974) is one going to say, is for a specific taste indeed, and certainly a passionate discussion no Janusz Mazzoni would help. It does have other points of interest, though. Mazzoni has played an astonishing variety of different roles, and made over 700 films, some of them very good ones. To see them laid up chronologically, as in the book, with titles, synopses and quotes from the reviewers, makes one realize how difficult it is, even for a great artist, to put together a consistent body of discerning artistic work. Those familiar with Peter's Old Times will be pleased to see a synopsis of *Gold Men* that, along with a picture of P.P. McCormack.

*The National History of the Cinema* (by Doreen and John Parker, Lansdowne Press, 1974) lives up to its promising title, tracing the growth of a species of fauna inhabiting theatres and the decks of ocean liners. Horace Ziegfeld himself had certain firm rules for selection of girls which struck off the stockpiled "The shoulder-blades, the gleaming mouths of the backs, and the innocence of the lower regions" (so in direct line with each other). "No doubt there is a magic and a mystery about a well-drilled chorus line, but this book fails to capture it." The pictures particularly, demonstrate that the "romance and adventure" (Ziegfeld's words) must come from the stage, not the pages of a book.

This more probably applies to cameras, in spite of the extensive and fascinating coverage given there in *Cinema: A World History* by Robert Craft-Cook and Peter Coate, (Ure Smith, 1974). The book is nevertheless painstakingly researched, intelligently and entertainingly written and attractively produced. People with even a passing interest in cameras should get a lot of fun out of it.

*Hollywood and the Great Stars* (Hamlyn, 1974) is a sort of extended colour supplement to books I tend to judge the kind of thing by what they say about Bogart, and although I'm sure it true, I don't particularly want to be told

that "he is a real hero, a man who walks straight and unswerving line, a man who lived entirely by his own high standards." This book does capture something of the glamour, however, rather though the fanshawes will find it. If you just want a few good shots of your favourite stars it might be worth it.

*The Surveyor's Images* (by Alexander Blund, Cassell, 1976) is a very fine book, consisting chiefly of photographs of him, usually in his surveying gear, and into the distance or leaping readily into the air. Leaping into the air, I suppose, as in a thing done as a bit of art, and a looks particularly impressive captured in a photograph. Many famous photographers, including Cecil Beaton, Helmut Newton, Bronson and Lord Snowdon (or whatever his other names) are represented, and it is a book which bullet buyers or those interested in photography might love to own. It is all Surrey, which I found rather boring after a while, but I am told that there are many people really in love with him. For them this will be a very appealing book.

The next is truly a coffee table book — if it had legs it would function quite well. And how suitable it is all about Australian films. *The Australian Screen* (by Eric Rensel, Lansdowne, 1973) is a large, heavy book charting the development of Australian film-making from the beginning until 1974. It may be hard for a publisher to see such a lavishly book due to its quantity, and the perspective of the recent past, and the perspective of the recent

years change so suddenly. Some of the finer grace passes away towards the end of this book will no doubt be general in similar volumes published in five or ten years but overall this is a useful volume. It has hundreds of stills and photographs and a vast amount of information on who was making what with whom.

The rest of the books in this Christmas selection are not just coffee table books. Two of them at least deserve a place in the library of anyone interested in the performing arts. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Australian Moral Knights* (G.L.P., 1977) is what the publishers call an indispensable work of reference, with over 5,000 entries on bodies, people, theatres and theatrical terms. *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Rock* (compiled by Nick Fagan and Bob Wellford, Ure Smith, 1977) is useful and up-to-date; unlike *Encyclopaedia of Pop, Rock and Soul* (by Inga Schubert, Lansdowne Press, 1974, 1977) which although apparently revised this year has not been revised. It is hard to take seriously a book that quotes Bob Dylan's work after Dylan's death.

*The National Theatre* (Architectural Press, 1977, supplied by A.N.Z. Book Co.) is the *Architectural Review Guide* to London's new landmark. It covers the history, architecture, features and artistic emphases of this controversial building which seems destined about the Sydney Opera House will have to deserve as cheap but effective. This is a well-produced and comprehensive guide, with some impressive, and sometimes startling, photographs. Commenting on the controversy Mark Gruarow points out that Sir Raoul and the Houses of Parliament were both constructed hopefully out of date and continuing when they were finished. "Like them," he says, "The National Theatre can afford to wait."

I have saved till last *Directed by Ken O'Hall* (Lansdowne, 1977) because this is my choice, from this particular collection, for an all-purpose Christmas book. In the current boom (much fuelled by Hall for ignoring sound commercial principles of film-making) and with the increasing interest in masters of our artistic past, this book fits in very well. It is writing in the chatty, anecdotal style intrinsic to that sort of thing, with unusual postscript coming across as charming revelations of the master. As an exercise of a hand on film-making and an inspiring role of a man who made successful films with very limited resources it should be popular. Above all, for Christmas, it is a very handsome book and the designer, David Deakin, is to be congratulated.



# Ray Stanley's WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS

After all the rumour with the Australian Ballet don't be surprised if Sir Robert Helpmann assembles his own company to tour Australia next year, with some shows at no international ballet stars drawn from France, Italy, England and America — but not Russia. Believe me bookings have already been made for Her Majesty's in Sydney and the Palace in Melbourne to accompany seasons of the Reg Livermore written and directed musical *Ned Kelly*, which premieres in Adelaide December 30.

Kate Brodrick and Michael Edgley obviously aren't superstitious cause they've set A Choice Date to open in Melbourne on Friday January 13th. By the end of its Sydney run it will have taken over \$2 million at the box office and KB and ME confidently expect to top that figure in the Southern State. And the next big musical from American who look like being there — to be presented jointly by JC Willemsen Productions (Kate Brodrick) and Michael Edgley.

After the huge success of the TV Movie *In the House* and Doctor in Love on the stage here, it seems likely we'll be seeing her or *The Knobblar* with the original TV stars. And we can expect Paula Wilcox (of *Man About the House*) to tour Australia for *One Day in My Life*. Friend she's already played it in Adelaide. Undoubtedly Lee Mack Phillips would like to make another Australian tour — this time in his current London comedy *On Target*.

Good to see Terry Denean putting a really big break on the stage at last with the title role in the MTC's *Brooklynn Manor*. Two of the best performances seen in Melbourne in the 80's were at the Emerald Hall when Terry played Black in *Car* as a *New Zealand* and *Billy Blue*. Dorothy Hamill will be taking up appearance as playwright-in-residence with the Hiaplo Theatre Foundation. Hoping are almost certain too to stage her *Box Boat and Rover for Emily*. An tall Vincent Price would like to bring his new one-man show on *Outer Space* later. If he does, wonder if he will, American born Carol Brown, will accompany him, and, if she does, of course will sign her up for a play, like, or maybe something on TV. She hasn't played here since going to London in 1984, and has only made a couple of brief stops back. Yet I recall when I first

viewed her in London in 1984 how good she was then, proud of the fact she still had an Australian passport!

John Douglas, John O'May and Michael Dyson from The 70 and 80 That Just Are Waiting to Come their next musical. Underneath it will be built around one of the all-time big Hollywood silent comedies. Ken Broadbent is writing the American premise of the re-arranged German musical *Die Tapferen Schuetzen von Novgorod* before making any decision to set up an Australian production. Back in Australia in 1979 will be short drag duo Hinge and Dragger from their last time here they've never returned to work in one studio or another.

Festive attractions at Melbourne's Comedy tent particularly to *The Polish Monk Theatre*.

New Year's Nostalgia will be world premiering Tim Gooding's *Rusticade*, sponsored by the Friends of Sydney. It's described as "the last lost Harlequin romance". Directed by Richard Wherrett and designed by Brian Thomas, cast will consist of Tony Lloyd-Wilkinson, Ken McLaughlin, Bobbi Ramay and Jackie Weaver. Underneath *Hoopla* will be presenting another production shortly afterwards with John Waters, Janette Cullin and Gertie Blandell and possibly Nancy Hayes.

Kate Brodrick has done it again! It was the proud boast of the ACTC Services that in their 25 years — 1964-89 — they made a profit every year. And at the 25th year of its operations J.C. Williamson Productions — despite a rocky start with the failed *Mother Courage* Teller — also can show a profit. Has very strong talk that one of Australia's leading playwrights, Miller known for straight plays, will be coming up with a big musical. Wonder if it will be followed or historical?

Early in the new year the Alexander Theatre at Monash University will be presenting Ben Sulay and Paul Prime's latest children's musical, *The Emperor's New Clothes*. For those wondering why Parrotree Productions planned *John, Paul, George, Ringo and Beeb* was quashed, the answer could lie in the fact that Parrotree's sole tour of *Sixty Six* last year lost over \$42,000.

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# 100 Years On

Eric Irvin reviews the year in Australian Theatre 100 years ago

In 1877 there were actors in Sydney and Melbourne theatre three "perks" who were to dominate popular theatre in Australia right up to the first decade of the present century—George Darrell, Alfred Dampier and Ward Hall.

The plays in which they acted were the first flowering in Australia of the sentence drama produced overseas some twenty years earlier by Dion Boucicault (in his *James Fane* (1853), *Jerusha* (1854), and *The Collier Boys* (1855)).

The seeds of the Australian sentence drama were sown by the Sydney dramatist, W. H. Cooper, in his *Son and Shadow*, (1874), *Foolish* (1875), and *Murder* (1875). Darrell followed on his heels, producing plays with an Australian setting and content which also appealed to these young audiences and resulted in settings rather than in their play of characters.

By 1877 Darrell had shown in his *Transported for Life* that the amalgam of English and Australian problems can juxtapose, and the terms "hero" and "heroine" could be used successfully to produce a play which could hold its own with English melodrama.

George Darrell started his stage career as an amateur in Dunedin, N.Z., and progressed from there to his first professional role in Melbourne. By 1877 he was well established in both countries as actor and author, and had also acted in his plays in San Francisco, Philadelphia, Salt Lake City, and New York.

At the beginning of 1877 Darrell and his wife, the actress Fanny Cathcart, were back in New Zealand, playing in particular at Dunedin, in a repertoire version of George Washington's *Trojan妇*. Darrell had first produced that in Sydney in 1875.

In Sydney, a young American actor, George D. Chaplin, was drawing full houses every night at the Theatre Royal or Canterbury Street, in a programme of plays ranging from *Hamlet* to *Caesar* to the American sentence drama, *Across the Continent*. Acting and sketching here at that was the American actress, Anna Roche.

All the local Victorian theatres in Pitt Street, the actor-dramatist Alfred Dampier was making his first Sydney appearance, in *Hawke*. His interpretation was not merely a success, it created a furor, and was repeated many times during

OPERA HOUSE.  
RICARDO AND ALICE  
L T COKE

## THIS EVENING.

The appearance of the Australian Actor-Author,  
**MR. GEO. DARRELL**

In a New and Original Australian Play, written by himself,  
entitled,

# The Squatter

*A. J. French's edition*

George Darrell (as Australian Squatter)	Mr. George Darrell
Freddy Larkins (as Advanced)	Mr. G. R. Johnson
"Kev" (Kerry) (as Old Shepherd)	Mr. W. G. Carpenter
Wounded March (as Melbourne Aborigine)	Mr. S. Chang Whyle
Arthur Stock (as Son)	Mr. J. H. Hart
Miss C. Murray (as Miss Elizabeth)	Miss J. K. Cuthbert
The Hon. George de Lough (as Captain "Nash")	Mr. Leo Parker
Frederick Foyne (Actor and Comedian)	Mr. G. P. Carey
Detention Officer (of the Police)	Mr. J. A. Patterson
Rev. Mr. Coates (of the Clergy)	Mr. Colquhoun
Delaney (as Servant)	Miss Gladys Stevens
Aboriginal (Song of the Bushman)	Miss Emily Flannery
Miss Margaret (as Mrs. Stockton in study)	Miss Louise Coulter
Wand (March's daughter)	Miss Rosina Walker
Porter .....	Miss George Johnson
Captain .....	Miss Louise Parker
Dyer .....	Miss Mary White

ACT I.—March's Return, Melbourne.—The working day—The author goes—First reader.

ACT II.—Scene 1.—Twelve months later—Darrell's return—The old Shepherd. Scene II.—Bush meeting—Larkins' lodgings, Melbourne—The sacred cow.

ACT III.—Scene 1.—Elizabeth meets after—March's marriage—The Stationary boy before. Scene II.—Bush meeting—The return ball, Town Hall, Melbourne.—The diversity—The sacristan—The goddess of memory.

ACT IV.—Three months later—March's House—Meeting the reader.

Note.—"The Peacock Song With" (recited in Act III) was written by George Darrell and composed by David Cope.

ing the year. The first Grindallogger in this production was the young Ward Hall, who had made his first Sydney, and first Australian appearance the year before.

Alfred Dampier arrived in Australia from Manchester in 1871 under contract to George Cappa at the Melbourne Theatre Royal. He opened in his own dramatic version of *Charles's First Gun*, giving what the critics described as a "stirredly impersonation of Mephistopheles." At the end of his three-year contract with Cappa he set out on a New Zealand tour, and there established himself as successfully as Darrell had done.

Meantime, at the Sydney Theatre Royal in 1877 another American couple was "stirred it." Mr. and Mrs. F. M. Bassett. They appeared in an English version of *Queen Abraham*, a play made famous in the Indian original by Madame Rostrevor. For whom it had been written by Paul Guicciardi. Rostrevor had played it in Melbourne and Sydney in 1875. The companion was "adored," and the Bassets found their true level in their new production, the melody of *The Flowers of the Forest*. They continued at the Theatre Royal with *Curie, The Long Stroke, Ham* and *Gloves, East Lynne*, and *Madame Jarback*, like the earlier *Queen Abraham*, they should not have exemplified.

Dampier followed his *Hamlet* with

*Moribut*, Much Ado About Nothing (in which Hall was Dogberry), and then his dual domination of scenes from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, called *Victor Hugo's Satan or Satan's Victor*. Next he played in his version of *Henry VIII*, *Cappuccino*—Our Emrys—with Hall as Urish Meep. Then came *Ed* for Gold, an adaptation of Eugène Sue's novel, *The Wandering Jew*, written for him by the Australian playwright, F. R. C. Hopkins.

At this time Australia's playwrights were to be found among the country's no-toriety and many newspapers, for reasons which do not need to be labourious. One exception was F. R. C. Hopkins, a squat who had the franking and guidance of Alfred Dampier in his work. All the journalists-journalists were, or had been at some time, amateur artists.

In *Ed* for Gold, the story of the perils undergone by two young children on a search through France for safety which is rightly theirs, Dampier featured his two young daughters, Lily and Rose. He played their friend and protector, Dogberry. The play proved immediately popular, largely because of the excellent, heart rendering acting of Dampier and his children.

Dampier then gave Sydney its chance to see his *Forest*, but this time he had competition from the Theatre Royal, where

**DAMPSTER SEASIDE**

Shakespeare Night

**Romeo and Juliet**

Cast of Characters—

Frances (Princess of Verona)	Mr. J. THOMAS
Friar (young nobleman, known to the Princess)	Mr. S. LEVYMAN
Capulet (House of two houses of Verona with Montague) (Friends of two houses of Verona with Montague)	Mr. J. GIBSON each other
Mercutio (Lover to the Prince, and friend to Romeo)	Mr. ALFRED DUMPER
Mercutio (Lover to Montague and friend to Romeo)	Mr. F. R. BELL
Tybalt (friend to Lady Capulet)	Mr. J. M. SCHAFFNER
Paris (Lover to Frances)	Mr. EDWARD HOLLYDAY
Juliet (Lover to Romeo)	Miss ANNE WATSON
Benvolio (Brother to Mercutio)	Mr. E. LITTLE
Gregory (Friends to Capulet)	Mr. ALEXANDER
Peter (servant to Juliet's nurse)	Mr. HARRY LESTER
Aerobics	Mr. C. COOPER
Aerobics	Mr. J. STARK
Page to Paris	Miss WALTERS
Lady Capulet	Miss ANNIE WATSON
Juliet	Miss LILY DUMPER
Mercutio to Juliet	Miss JULIA HICKSON

**TO-MORROW NIGHT.**

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**FOR THE TERM OF****His Natural Life.**

Chaplin put on the Beaumarchais version of the same play. *The Merchant of Venice*, Dampster's Mispresentation was accorded to no character he had impersonated. Chaplin's wit was not so good, though the play as a whole was better mounted at the Royal than it was at the Victoria. Neither production took with the public.

Dampster continued his successful and extended Sydney season with productions of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Much Ado About Nothing* and Mary, when he returned to Melbourne Theatre Royal for a Blight season "previous to his approaching departure for America." Twenty-two of these eight were taken up by Mr. G. Holt, so his season was extended; in the production of the volume was played by W. J. Holloway, later to become, in his own way, another "genie" of the Australian theatre. On the last night of the play George Cope presented the Dampster children with a gold locket each, and F. R. C. Hopkins gave them a gold cross.

After this Dampster produced Charles Webb's full-length play, *Amble Pie*. This was a failure. The critics threw doubt on its originality, saying it was a copy of portions of several well-known English plays of the period. Webb replied, with a great deal of truth: "If Mr. Oscar Wilde, Mr. H. Byron, Mr. W. S. Gilbert, and even the late

laureate Mr. W. Shakespeare — I place them in the order of their present popularity — of these gentlemen and their plays were constantly subjected to the above accusations and with which my poor little pie is compared, how would the word 'original' in its strict sense apply to it in such gods' mouths?"

On 19 July 1877 it was announced that Gwendolyn Welch had written a new, one-act play for Dampster and his children — an adaptation of American author J. Whistler's novel, *Father Bobo*. As the title suggests Lily and Rose Dampster acted, sang, danced, and recited. At the conclusion of the act the Dampsters sailed off to Adelaide.

Dampster returned to Sydney from New Zealand in June, opening at the Victoria. The new work has made a newest play, *Transported for Life*, which had been given its premiere at the tiny Queen's Theatre in Dampster the year before. It had a record Sydney run of 31 performances.

*The Merchant* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and his amateur includes a cottage interior with a fine view of the landscape outside, a pastoral scene of a dairymaid tending her cattle, a scene "on board ship" with a "bare" man at the wheel, and that of the Nurse from *Hamlet* by a passing star not? Gwendolyn Welch played in this part of an amateur company

In the same month the Theatre Royal was given over to drama, the opening production being Webb's *De Ballo* in matinées, with eight English principals. The Queen's Theatre, closed and refurnished, was taken over by the American actor, Charles Wrennagh, who opened with *House of the World is Eighty Days*, dramatized from John Verne's novel. It was a big success.

Dampster continued his Sydney tour with two more of his plays, *The Young Card*, and *Men and Wives*, and a series of popular melodramas. In November he went on one of his usual provincial tours, with seasons at Newcastle and Maitland and, with seasons at Newcastle and Maitland and

In Melbourne, Chaplin joined the actress Ada Ward in a long season of pantomime, and there was an open season in which the first Australian performance of Verdi's *Adriana Lecouvreur*.

The Dampsters returned to Sydney from Adelaide in September, and were through their repertoire again, this time at the Queen's Theatre, as a result of which Master H. P. Fenton, a 13-year-old, wrote and published "*The Lily and the Rose Waltz*," dedicated to Lily and Rose Dampster.

The Dampsters then left for America, and the Queen's was given over to light opera. Chaplin came back to Sydney for another season, and bland Holt broadened his experience as director at the Christmas performances at Melbourne Theatre Royal.

Because of the success in Australia of Holt's *Belshazzar*, Gwendolyn Welch became the first Australian dramatist to have a play performed in London. The Dampsters gave this play at the California Theatre, San Francisco in November 1877, then at the Broadway Theatre, New York early in 1878. In August 1878 they produced it at Birmingham (Eng.), and the following month at London's Clarendon Theatre.

George Dampster found his true vocation as dramatist in *Transported for Life*, and continued his long run of success with similar plays, culminating in the production of his *The Swamp South* at Lyndhurst in 1884.

Gwendolyn Welch, having learned her business with the Dampster and Dampster companies, moved into the matinee drama business herself with a series of London successes, and then became "Australian." He simply adopted popular English plays, gave them an Australian setting, and casted in on the demand for Australian scenes featured if not created by his former employer.

W. J. Blighomy developed into a good Shakespearean actor, and later formed his own company for a tour of South Africa, where he gave long versions of Shakespeare. In 1883 he was at London's Lyceum Theatre, alternating with Henry Irving in the title role of *King Lear*. Next he acted with Irving in Berlin in 1884 to 1885 to 1886 at Terry's Theatre in London as manager. In the same year Alfred Dampster was also in London, at the Princess's Theatre, adapting the Welsh-Dampster version of Robin Hood's *Robbery Under Arms*.

# FROM HARRY TO PATRICK

Barry Eaton's namedroppers guide to Sydney eating places.

If there is one thing most actors and actresses enjoy nearly as much as working or reading not, I spoke to a random selection of the acting profession in Sydney to find some of their favourite haunts. Some like to eat before a show, but most seem to prefer being able to relax and eat afterwards.

**Rowan Atkinson** likes the Little Sausi A French Restaurant at Bondi where he says, the food and the service is consistently good.

**Shane Warne** adores the barbecue squat ribs and also the atmosphere of Men Crazier Woodlands.

**For Pat Bishop, the Shantung in Kings X, "is excellent Peking style Chinese food at the only price in town I can afford."**

## WILLIE FENNELL: POTS

**Willie Fennell** says, "I'm a bit mad on the Pots at North Sydney. Its inexpensive, bloody good food. They serve a great New Zealand lamb cutlet and the Pot is really handy to where I live."

**Adam Goodes** says simply, "Le Cafe. They are artists." **Jacqui Warner** agrees adding, "Le Cafe is adventurous, exciting and they have movable mezzes."

**John Merton** likes to eat at his "lodge" — the Moonee Rowing Club, where he is a life member. "It's close to the water and I love it," says John, but he often takes his wife Hurley Gibson to various restaurants around Neutral Bay. Particularly Maggie & Me where they play 'Maggie & Me' music. They also play 'Tap tap on the window' whenever the McPhersons arrive.

The chef at the Moonee Rowing Club gets another vote from **Dawn French**, who is off to found dark rooms in panels there. He also enjoys **Fiddlers**. There is

Cirrus.

**Nancy Hayes** often books at **Bistro**, the little bistro/garden restaurant at the back of the pub in Queen St. **Margot Kidder** says in plain, "It's after my agent's as well as the TAB. So if I can't get any work, I can at least try to win some money on the horses!"

## HAYES GORDON: TAI YUEN

A long-time haunt for **Mary Gordon** is the Tai Yuen at the old markets. "They won't give me their secret recipe for Bibi-Ken chicken — so I have to keep going back," Hayes avows happily!

**Barbara Fife** also likes Chinese food and enjoys eating at any restaurant in **Dixon Street** she happens to see.

**Jodie Foster** is fond of French and Lebanese food. "Au Chabat at Burleigh is absolutely superb. Neil Fitzpatrick introduced my husband and I to it earlier this year. The blackboard menu is really different. Not one of the dishes is in my French cooking books, a bonus!"

**Audrey Hepburn** loves going to the **Tin Yuen** at Chatswood Heights. He also loves jello cake, for what it's worth.

## KATE FITZPATRICK: LE CAFE

**Le Cafe** gets a lot of raves from Sydney's actors and writers. **John Bell** and **Anna Fossiter** are regulars. Anna says, "French really care about food and creating delicious interesting dishes." They both admire the beautiful surroundings. Playwright **Dorothy Hewitt** says, "I love going there every Friday for lunch to talk to writers friends. People like Helen Neeson, Jennifer Clance and Arthur Dignam. Even Patrick White and Jim Sharman drop in whenever they can." Then by way of an afterthought, "I also like the food." **Antonia Prebble** also raves about Le Cafe and is often in attendance.

**Henry Strozier** on the other hand likes going to **Mother of Baldwin** for breakfast. All because he needs maple syrup on toppers to wake up in the morning. It makes you wonder just what he does at night!

**Jane Broadbent** loves going to the Little Sausi after the show, because it's open and the food is good. **Angeline Ross** also favours the Little Sausi. "The food is great and they love having theatregoers there. What's more it's a long持久的 evening."

The problem of eating after a show is a

ring out in Sydney, at most places don't want to know you after 11 pm.

# TONY LLEWELLYN-JONES: CHINESE CLUB

Peter Llewellyn-Jones, who's the president by voting regularly at the Chinese Club in Double Bay which is open until 1 am. According to Tony it is exclusively for Chinese members only, but is always full of the whole chink eating cheap food!

Peter Whigham dashes out to the Cheyenne Restaurant at Campbells Cove Bridge. "The tables, soft lighting and elegant surroundings make one feel less hideous after doing a shot."

Peter Whigham heads for Nanna's in Bourke St near Taylor Square. "Name is Greg Bailey and he keeps the place open until the last person leaves. The clientele is amazingly theatrical," enthuses Peter. "There are strange paintings on the walls and a sword chess. It is also B Y O I think Derek Neimoi there and he nearly brought the place down with his taxes."

Theatre P.R. man Trevor de Poy's recommendations: Waiters in Riley St Darlinghurst is a refined place that serves after-theatre suppers.

This article is a nonstopoppers paradise, but John Moore had to upstage everybody. His choice is Doyle's on the water-front at Watsons Bay. A nonstopoppers lunch there was with Hal Price and his wife Judy, Shipton Southdown and Phyllis Newcourt. The message from the O.S. visitors was -- this is paradise! For John it was even better than that because Hal paid the bill.

Peter Parkinson has two favourite restaurants (greedy little devils!) The lower rail because it is a very theatrical experience. There is also a great pub nearby to purchase wine for the meal. His other is the Cheyenne in Gordon. "The best Chinese food in Sydney," according to Peter. "A lot of the Killeen old people eat there."

# GERALDINE TURNER: UNA'S

Geraldine Turner sighs. "It's really bad. I have lots of places. Una's Espresso Bar is Kangaroo Cross is a place like it. It's authentic Italian. Always good food and very cheap. I love their beans -- They also serve great coffee."

John Gudger likes Harry's Cafe de Wheels because he says to eat there is no experience you can't top.

A friendly Frenchman has a spot just up the road from Harry's, L'Entrecote. "It's a tiny bistro and you get the best entrecôte steaks in town, with the most magnificent sauce. The two Frenchmen who run it are very sweet. They are the last Frenchmen in town."

# KEN HORLER: TONY'S

Ken Horler and his wife Julian take a quiet lunch and head off between Winton, to Tony's. They like the elegant informality, the magnificence and originality of the surroundings and service.

Arch Fermi dessert Sunda at McElhone's Point. "Ross Hartman the manager has many other concessions. It's also a wonderful place to take overseas visitors. Very romantic setting."

Dan Read suggests something different. The Commonwealth Club in the St. James Building. It is not a club, but a place serving beautiful sandwiches. Mostly vegetarians try to get a bay window and watch all Sydney happening.

Joe Karkas likes the Greek food at Dimitri's Golden Oni in Redfern. It's very pleasant (here and there is also dancing). Joe adds, "I know the owner, which makes it even more enjoyable."

All of these suggestions sound very mouth watering and I've seen a lot of fun can be had trying them out. If this hasn't been of help to you, perhaps Peter Sheldon's idea will please. Visit a Pizza Hut, take home a pizza and watch the late night movie at T.V. My favorite recommendation was from Carol Parkinson who really loves the pie and pasta offered at Harry's Cafe de Wheels. She really likes to go there however to meet all the sailors off the boats.

See you at Harry's.



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# Ba-ha-ha-ha-harry Ha-ha-ha-humphries

Cuckoo in the Nest

Pamela Ruskin

Australia's greatest comedian, the man who took the mucky out of Melbourne, Harry Humphries, announced on radio before he left Australia to travel, the journals of Sydney, that he had been invited by an American oil millionaire to paint his wife a portrait. Some press promptly he had seen a portrait done by Harry of Sir Robert Menzies and was so impressed that he had never forgotten it. Unless he painted a second portrait of Sir Robert, the portrait that longest so lovingly in the mind's memory is hanging at the end of the Bank's long narrow Victoria hall, a source of fascination to all who pass us.

It is a large painting, a collage not a painting, that was delivered to us one evening — the second last day of 1958 to be precise, by Barry Maxwell assisted by an antique dealer friend of his, perhaps with the George Bernard slogan in mind that it is "an antago of the future". The portrait was part of an exhibition of "The Little Australians" held at "The Cinema Chapel of Australia" — the Myer Music Hall that year, and I had admired it greatly. I will do. There is Pig Iron Bob against a background of great paper from his auto-biography, "Afternoon Light", his face covered with little rubber stamps of a pig, and the features, various epithets and all, sharp and brilliantly delineated in charcoal. The blueness is remarkable.

## ha-ha

The only of the Texas ridiculous well used to be done in silk with little patches and smudges, keeping out of her face. That is, of she needs it at. With Harry, one can never be sure. That as here the portrait is a typical example of Harry's amateurish gravity. Dame Edna Everage, who is inclined to dispense of him, would never concur with such prolixity with one of the nation's art experts.

At 43, the middle-aged and somewhat tired Mr Humphries, who works at a ferocious pace, seems to be a real old codger compared with his alter ego, the exuberant, bumptious and supremely confident Dame Edna. Like all very, very fun

ay people, Harry is basically a very, very serious man. Whenever he talks an audience dear to his heart, such as the connoisseurs of old buildings, Australian art and so on, the public reaction is one of grave disappointment. Every profile we expect to wear the mask of comedy whenever they appear in public.

He suffers from that "credo-maniac" which means that he is never able to explore all his talents and this leads to a certain amount of frustration. He writes very well indeed, not only in terms of his own material but in other fields too. I remember his poem in the school magazine, straightforward statements of war among them. He has written a good deal about painting and his white in Australia this time, been trying to find a book on the work of Charles Conder. He has painted some really beautiful landscapes. As a straight actor he goes on a glimpse of his potential in the role of the School Principal in the film, *The Gathering of Windows*, in which he brought a formidable and convincing conviction.

As a performer he is a complete perfection. Dame Edna is simply the prima donna of a banquet of miraculously real characters. His programmes are the ones that seem to me to give value for money. They make hilarious reading and contain items of Dame Edna's famous maps, shorts of eccentric autobiography and, among other writings, a page of laughter-making "Poetry & Quirks". Here his correspondence covers the Humphries touch. I have an envelope that contained a letter from Harry, which has on it one of those dreamy stamps of ours, this one the picture of a postie postman with a widow's mitebox, named G.H. Read. The envelope carries a large rubber stamp that says: "NOTE: I AMAGINATIVE AUSTRALIAN STAMP" and there is a disembodied hand with one finger dropped to it. Another envelope has two rubber stamps on it. One reads, "FIGHT THIEF NOT THE VIET CONG! They Don't Kill Our Soldiers!", while the second says "WARNING: Thug Kills Soldier". Another letter is typed under the heading, "The Society for the Preservation of WAR SAVINGS Sheet Signs" "P.S. for Bryan Jim" Secretary. It

Humphries President, Barry Humphries.

Dame Edna made her debut at a Christmas party put on by the Union Theatre Company called "Return Fare" in 1955, but she really began to make her mark in a sketch at a Theatrical Garden Party, an annual event in those days, the following year. Harry was wearing something that has never ceased to appeal him, Australian knopholes. In this sketch, Mr. Everidge had presented himself at the Town Hall, offering to sell his masters to the forthcoming Olympic Games. I remember laughing until I had a stitch in my side, Edna characterised all these categories of people who would not be worthy to share the suburban magnificence of Edna and Norma's home. The quip last night has been heard in my family twice, was "I don't mind New Australians but I can't STAND foreigners!"

## ha-ha

It was from these small beginnings, built up by some stage experience with MUTE, that Harry developed his extremely successful one-man show, including, *A Night At The Entertainment* (1962), at which I saw a man fall off his chair laughing, *Strive I* (1963), *Just A Show* (1965) and *At Least You Can Say You're Sorry* (1970), the last reluctantly presented by Clyde Perdue without the assistance of The Australia Council.

In between, he has been invited as a guest by London's West End critics and audiences alike and played three to packed houses for several weeks. I turned on the television in my hotel room in London during the Jubilee celebrations and caught part of a Royal Command circus performance. To my amazement, out onto the stage came Dame Edna Everidge, commanding all her celebratory glee in pay-per-view tribute to her BBC, the audience and her fellow performers. She was such a nut that I swear I saw the Big Top tremble along the destination approach. A BBC special was as outrageously funny that the interviewer was quite unable to proceed as planned, a comment that for all

Those who risk taking on "Australia's own Superstar".

# ha-ha

Harry's gift for creating chaos took him a long way. At Melbourne Grammar, that round peg in a very square hole, forced to attend football and cricket matches, theoretically to provide moral support, not a role for which he is well suited, would find a seat, turn his back on the game, bring out some very strange-looking looking-glass and proceed loudly with "Suck one! Piss off! Pull stopped much ever" monologues. On another occasion, he and a friend managed to hypnotise the maths master with some Harry mesmerising results. His

travels, the wrath of the headmaster, Mr Fletcher, by refusing absolutely to join the under-13s, explaining that, "I am a *conscious objector*". In fact the description is a fairly accurate summing up of Harry's general attitude to authority of all kinds. He can overreact here and nothing less will do.

Ordered to get his hair cut on his arrival at army camp during his National Service, he asked, "Could I see the barber's certificate of qualification?" Naturally the barber couldn't produce one but the idea was so impressed by the unusual regard for regulation, that he was sent by staff car from Parks to Seppelts, where "a little man produced an ancient and fly-blown certificate for my inspection and my hair was duly cut". Harry remembers this with fondish satisfaction.

In 1969, in London, a confrontation took place between the then Premier of Victoria, Sir Henry Bolte, the man who

had so often been good to his neck, and Barry Humphries. The setting, appropriately enough, was Australia House for Harry's advanced on Mr Humphries surveyed him with a notable lack of enthusiasm and said coolly, "You've had a good run". With consummate courtesy, Harry beat his head slightly and replied, "You've had a better one."

When the ubiquitous Harry M. Miller returned from London just after the opening of *A Day At Show* here, he attacked Barry and the show in nothing terms. Humphries is doing more harm to Australia on stage than a whole bunch of dowdy politicians could do in a month. That man Humphries is a nut!

Mr Humphries does not believe that the mask behind the mask, however, does not oblige him to the exercise of having the other cheek. Warning up gently, he said, "I have hand on hip right myself



I have fore-borrowed Harry and have been when he made his interesting statement." He added, "Poor old beggar. He must be thinking he's not getting a cent out of the show." Then he combed over the centre of the stage and proceeded to deliver a series of knock-out lines. "I am writing a patriotic offering based on the successful career of a few Australian footmen I'd hope my dear friend and artistic adviser Mr Bradley will approve. I am also making a massive study of Booz on the Band and Hoor, Mr Miller's current offering, in the hope of learning further lessons in patriotic play writing."

From this you can deduce that Barry is never, repeat NEVER, boastful in a verbal battle. To be fair, it must be admitted that there are many who don't understand, or if they do understand, don't like Barry's calling and taunting word-ups of what he regards as the grossness and tastelessness of Australian humour, and the gross vulgarity of "Okie-dokie". That they can, however, do so but there are those who find his blustering reaction to it, as tasteless as the Australia he pillories so mercilessly. Perhaps there is something to be said for both points of view.

# ha-ha

Humphries presents two styles of humour. There is the subtle, which I think is very clever and very funny and there is the scatological bawdry of the Barry McKenna type - which, again speaking personally, I find revolting. He has been responsible for some very black jokes in his time. Once upon a time, at Luna Park, wearing a broad-brimmed hat and dark glasses and carrying a long staff, he climbed up to the top of the Jack and Jill slide and then hurried down, uttering "Where am I? What's happened? I'm blind!", drawing a horrified crowd to witness him at the bottom.

He started a race with a friend one day. The friend had broken a platelet, many bandages and was on crutches. Harry proceeded to kick and trip and abuse the "injured" friend, cursing near hysterics among the passengers in the carriage. He was younger then. More recently, he is said to have planned a series of British short plays and a cooked chicken in a cage rabbit cage and then approached a, dressed in stage attire, sympathetic producer from passer-by as he rearranged them. When he brought out the champagne and chicken, the youth in the box was smothering to death.

Less offensive is the slyest joke of all. When travelling by plane, he produced the air neck bag from the pocket of the seat and, mainly chattering, by a kind of night-of-the-band, tipped the contents of a tin of Heinz Vegetable salad into it, taking the appropriate names as he did so. As I said before, he's older now! Such performances are rarer, let me assure.

In spite of the success of Barry McKenna and also of his various stage characters, by far the most durably sustained of which is the crusty, pathetic handy-bone, in a Hobo生涯, made a Dame in a mixture of spontaneous inspiration, by Geoff Whitham, who has won for Harry international acclaim. Anyone who has watched Harry peripose those front of the stalls, members of the audience who succeed in grabbing one of the gladhorns the robust dame hauls into the auditorium, to wave and herald their gladhorns in unison, will have witnessed a superb piece of hysteria-inducing nonsense. While everyone sings her famous "We're a gladhorn", the superior gallopin' missed the stage like a demented bitch. No one can imagine an audience like the Dame.

The strain on Barry's voice, shrieking and singing at an angle of 45 degrees is so great that during the run of a show, he conserves it during the day whenever possible by whispering and keeping all conversation to a minimum. This is probably the reason he has introduced Blameless of Luna's travel into the show to give his voice a break and these wacky lasses as they are, are extremely popular with audiences everywhere.

Last year, I went to the launching of Melbourne, of the Dame Edna Coffey Table Book. It was held at the Old and Fed Corporation's show rooms and was a riot. A display of some of Dame Edna's latest recipes had been arranged and the Dame gave us all a run down on such culinary horrors as "Snowball and Apple Sandwiches", "Nan's Famous Sausage and Pineapple Parfait" and, of course, Australia's very own "Larmingtons". Everyone was presented with a bacon-greased Fenton Web Spider Case, surrounded by a large plastic spider and the whole entombed in a plastic bag through the Dame's Edna had written a special "Message to the Women of Australia" in it, to mark the occasion. Here's a poem on Melbourne the Message Parlour city: "Right now in a St Kilda del Serrano's hotel lobby — Look around from head to foot — With baby oil and later."

# ha-ha

There is no end to the outrageous stories one could tell about Harry Humphries, the tall, now gently graying, limped-eyed antisocial who was certainly a member of the last of a very consequential family living in a conventional house in Caulfield. His father was a builder and there seems to have been no theatrical members in the family. He is now, a cushion in the nest of kindly deity Melbourne, a city that has always looked askance at those who fail to be decent to its inhabitants, let alone try to destroy them. Harry has treated them all as Aunty Sally's, and has run devastating.

My husband produced the catalogues for

the first Dame exhibition ever held in this country. It was of course arranged and curated by Harry. That was in 1952 when he was a youth of 18, an undergraduate in need of a diversion from the boredom of law school studies which he gave up very soon after. In all, he organised three such exhibitions. One of the exhibits, "Old Folks Too", showed an Old Melbourne bar located around a tree bottle. It was probably curated by an intemated and belligerent member of the Alma Mater and Barry was expelled from the Old Melbourne Association. This distressed him deeply, because, he explained, no he tried to contain his grief: "I wasn't a member anyway."

It says something for his form those days, that in spite of his attitude on the education he received there, his off-expressed desire for the whole audience, including muscle-bound conformity of public schools in general and Melbourne Grammar in particular, he has been asked back to speak to the boys on more than one occasion and has done so with the seal of a Dame. Dame offered the new hall and the weight of Geoff Boycott.

# ha-ha

Now Barry Humphries having conquered Australia and the ABC, London's West End and the BBC, and the frequenists of the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong, has begun his conquest and conquest of the New World. His off Broadway opening in mid-October, was performed by his New York TV client a couple of weeks earlier. On radio, H.E.R. died, because it was Dame Edna who took the last breaths but sparkling with and plunged about, having everyone involved in the show, bewitched and bedazzled, and, it is to be hoped, bemused.

One wonders whether Dame Edna's leverage and in fact all the other cards in the Barry Humphries pack, is essentially British in appeal or within the comprehension of the great American public. Possibly it will take more than one application of "Extragee" verbiage, to achieve results. Ultimately, once they've got over the shock of Dame Edna's high-powered banter, I would think that her appeal will prove to be universal.

Noticed Norm's pleasure. David Walsh, Clodagh's brother, on the telephone, saw Bresser's wonderful marriage daughter Valeria's unusual hairstyle. Like Barry's father and Edna's late Dame, wardrobe will strike as an answering note of a few show-and-American formats to become a source of mirth and useful pleasure. Sandy Stone and the regulars, like Morris O'Connor may not go down as well, but Dame Edna will conquer all those who become transfixed by the implacable politiq of the matron from Mamma Ponda.

But, after all, the Americans who taught us that "There is nothing like a dame."

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# From COUNTRY GIRL to CHORUS LINE

A musical comedy star is a precious theatrical commodity — an actor who can sing and dance is generally greeted with more enthusiasm by management, audiences and critics alike than an actor who just acts (unless he's an ACTOR like Oliver or Sculldit), but a singing dancing actor with pretentious charm, energy, presence and an ingratiating personality can stir up more excitement than New Year's Eve.

Australian performers have always prided themselves on their versatility, their ability to shift from drama to comedy, from Shakespeare to Music Hall at the wave of a costume. Although this may seem to be part of an actor's job anywhere in the world, in Australia the versatility comes more from necessity than choice. The fraternity of really good "all rounders" may be small, but the competitors within that circle is tough, and once a performer has his star falling in a big musical comedy, it's an uphill battle to continue proving yourself.

Whether Broadway and West End musical stars have always built around their particular talents and personalities the Australian musical star is at the mercy of the programme, who, out of necessity must select those shows that promise financial success, and they can be few and far between these days. Most of our current musical performers have something to fall back on. Glenda Brown was christened a "showbiz queen" some years ago and hasn't looked back. All Parsons is perfectly happy being a wife and mother. Ray Livemore realises he was a musical comedy in himself.

They are a few of the survivors who know that they are lucky to get a good variety role in a musical show every four or five years, and once you realise that, different avenues are open to you.

*To leave the country.* A lot of our performers take off once they achieve a basic knowledge of their craft and a few flashy reviews to help them along. Abbie

Fitzgibbon, Dorothy Johnson, Glenda Holland, Karen Colson and the late John Parker enjoyed much success in musical comedy. Jay Nichols, Keith Mitchell, Bill Hart and Lynne Franklin broke into musicals in London after Australian successes in other genres. Rod McLean and Fayre Mitchell, who attracted little attention in their home country, also found their talents in demand in the West End in double role parts and kept the rest paid. A case in point, nobody was occupied when Nancy Hayes, after working so hard to reach top billing with her decent performance in *Sweet Charity*, appeared in three films but under "guest" roles in *Providence Pictures*, *Flappers and Angels* and *Red Riding Hood*. Rather than sit at home with her soapbox, the lady kept herself at the public eye, about in and down and her position was rewarded with the lead in *Some Time Near Now*. Now that the rough edges have gone, Miss Hayes' performances recall a depth and sensitivity that prove that she has never stopped learning — and the best way to learn is to work.

*Or create your own employment.* Open a theatre restaurant, like Tiki's in John Newman or Kaita Parrotta. Write shows for yourself like *Ragtime*, or for other people, like Peggy Mortimer, Larrie Donaldson and Nancy Brown. Or hope television makes you look good.

And now a short history. Our first musical comedy stars, usually imported from England, worked for J.C. Williamson's Royal Comic Opera Company. Florence Yelling was the first in our grand tradition of leading ladies and George Lunn our most popular comedian. Wilf Claude, Mervyn, Chas. Caines, John Hallinan and dancers Fred Leslie and Ivy Shaking, the company presented such hits as *The Country Girl*, *The Beggar, The Duchess of Dungay* and *The Girl from Rye*.

In later years, William Croxwell headlined in *The Aviator* and May

Wood of Holliday, Carter Moore played *The Sheep Husband* and Blanche Brown charmed audiences in *Our Miss Gibbs* for 219 performances. Two great stars that reigned over this period were Maxine Price, who made her off-Broadway debut with *Group Up, Precious, You're in Love, Young Love* and *Tell Me More*, and the beloved Dorothy Branton who starred in *The Wizard of Oz*, *For Uncle, So Long Letty* (with Charlotte Greenwood), *Country Cottage* and in a countless appearance in 1931, the Rodgers and Hart musical *Bronx Danny*. Miss Branton's career came to an unexpected end when she was killed by a heavy fire curtain.

Gladys Moncrieff, born in Mandurah



Gladys Moncrieff in *Wild Horses*

# From COUNTRY GIRL to CHORUS LINE

into a family of singers, first tried the boards in the states of Venezuela (1917), working her way up to Broadway's vaudeville in *The Sunshine Girl*. A SCW tour of New Zealand and South Africa gave Gladys her first leading role, in *Kansas*, which transferred to Melbourne for a successful 14 week run, with Gladys singing her first hit song, 'Buckaroos'.

The following year, with subsequent appearances in *Mystique*, *Rising Sun*, *Two quick Mauds*, *Foxay*, *Don't sit on Dynomes*... before 1921 brought *Music of the Moonsong* and secured permanent stardom for the girl.

Although most of her subsequent work was for *The Fox* (JC Williamson, Palers Productions signed another of her masterpiece musicals in 1928, *My Man*).

Miss McDonald retired in the early 1930s, to, happy and wealthy, to live in Queensland, where she passed away recently. Fortunately, Our Children survived by original recordings and an autobiography, *My Life of Song* (Rabbit).

Meanwhile, back on the boards Dorothy Smith played alone (1922) with movie comedian Chester Clute, as Madame Lucy; later Minnie played *Sally*; Queenie Atkinson played *Sally*, and Anna Croft played *The Girl Friend*. Marie Burke followed up her success in *Vivian Maier's Midfives* (1924) with *Reyes the Dancer and Connoisseur* (1925). George Gee starred in Eddie Cantor's Broadway vehicle *Ruf Sooye* combining himself as a thin François, Monroe's son, comedian Alfred Fido, in *Holy Jinks*.

Cecil Richardson, who began his career in the chorus of *The Water-Dance* meeting Dorothy Bryant (1927), married with at mutual his wife, the lovely Madge Elliot, in several shows, including *The Prod. Lady*, *Rising Sun* and *Tom Drake*. After a



Cecile Richardson and Madge Elliot

longer international sabbatical, the couple returned frequently over the years to appear in musicals such as *Blue Moon*, *Cafe Society*, *Any Day Now* and *Seven Bells*. Richardson, and plays including *Footlight* on 6th. Cecile brought her vocal talents to film too, as Jim Gofford's *Gay Divorcee* and *Tell Me More*. Sydney Walling landed the lead roles in *Seven Bells* in the 1930s (1931) and *The Bachelor* (1936). Bert Neale and Charles Norman romped their way through countless pieces of musical fluff.

Vera Pearce enjoyed great success in *Four Weds and a Few Losses* and *The Old Chies*, and like many of her contemporaries and successors (Linda Fleming, Eve Grey, Carl Randall, Robert Charlton and Lee Arniston), Miss Pearce maintained a successful career on the English musical stage at the same time.

Lester Holliday, Ivy Kirby, Sidney Barcroft, Gwen Balcock, Sydney Wheeler, Max Laving, Lou Vernon, Mirren Lester, Jack Leighan, Rita Pauchant, Leo Franklin, Mac Beatty, Bobby Mack, Marie Ryan, Lily Moore, Cecil and Alan Kellaway, Jack Murray and Connie Holden, Ken Stirling and Lucy Craydon, Marjorie Gordon, Max Orlitzky and Colin Croft, are just some of the less-known artists who contributed memorable moments to the Australian musical theatre before the 1940s brought about a radical change in style, stemming from the 1943 Broadway production of *Oklahoma!*

Suddenly, the musical play, with integrated songs and ballads and intelligent

plotlines, came into being. No longer were musicals created around the special appeal of a dazzling name or a greatest specialty dancer. Imagination being required, and "personality" were forced to sublimate into believable characters. Some of the more adaptable artists from the old regime made the transition easily, but the most exciting result of this growth-up process was the appearance of a whole new generation of stars.



Bert Neale and Iris Haynes in *The Bachelor*

Iris Haynes came to Australia from the USA in 1939 with her husband Bill Mahoney and played in variety shows and pantomimes until *One for Sape Four* (1947) brought her to the public's attention. Miss Haynes played Anne Oakley for over three years with tremendous success, then she appeared with Hayes Gordon in *Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane* as producers of *Annie, Auntie McPhee* and *Oklahoma!* (playing Aunt Annie/Sarah



Charles Pennington as 'No. No. Nonsense'



Iris Haynes in *Oklahoma!*

# From COUNTRY GIRL to CHORUS LINE



Mrs. Adams, Sheila Brassey and Letty Copley in *Gone with the Wind*

now her popularity at this time, that the First was ready to offer Miss Hayes any role she wanted. When word spread, it came her in *Pearson House* and *South Pacific*, but instead she chose to return home until 1954, when she reprised another Ethel Merman role for Australian audiences, Sally Adams in *Call Me Madam*. After realising her worth in radio and television, Miss Hayes returned to the stage to play Mrs. Braving Famine, *Gold!* (1960), but disease has prevented any further stage appearances, as she is back in television and has entered the field of personal management.

Mrs. Gardner is another American who caused a sensation — in fact she hasn't stopped causing them. We first saw her in *All My Sons* (1951), then more the magnificent *Arrowsmith* with the voluptuous Morgan le Jeune in 1955. After setting up the Keswick Theatre in Sydney, Gordon returned to the musical stage in 1967 with his stunning portrayal of Tokyo in *Flower in the Dust*. He also founded and directed, with Jon Lovett, the exciting new company series, *At Merrimac Theatre*.

*All My Sons* was in the class of *South Pacific* and *Call Me Madam*, progressing to a small role in *Point Four Major*, then a superb performance as the middle-aged secretary Mabel in *The Pajama Game*. Her first leading role, *I Can Get It*, followed quickly, but it was not until her portrayal of Flanny Brown in *Funny Girl* (1968) that she had us at her feet. But *III and Out* up you do! I'm not going anywhere, and the lady who could lose grace, to Broadway stayed to be a national treasure instead. She is currently appearing in *Sally by the Lake* by Goulter.

Gloria Grahame played Sweeney at Brecht's Crumpton Theatre, *Witchcraft in Dixie* (as a Materress) (1958), Rose in *The Seven-Year Itch* (1961), Anna in *Gas* (1962 — again, Mrs. Postman in *The Threepenny Opera*) (1963) and *Mommie Dearest* in *Cyrano* (1971). The last record

speaks for itself. Now that Gloria has brought her talents to the wide screen, perhaps we will see her in an Australian musical film. Until then, she can be seen at Sydney's Music Box in her own show, *From London*, walked straight into the lead role in *The Pajama Game* (1973), and was promptly snapped up by that budding new medium, television, where she remained firmly entrenched for several years. Her stage appearances, including *Widow* (1960), *Oliver!* (1966), *Anything Goes!* (1970), *Guys and Dolls* (1973) and *Anna Karenina* (1974), have always been warmly welcomed, and before Miss Leonard left the country in 1976 to try her luck in the USA, she consolidated her position as the most popular actress in Broadway performances as Rose in *Guys*.

Sheila Brassey, after scoring a triumph in the West End production of *Kismet*, came to Australia as the star of the English musical, *Look Who's a Gondolier!* (1959) and stayed to star in *Oliver!*, *The King & I*, *Hansel & Gretel* and *Chicago*. Lynn A. Halligan, *The Man from the Mountain*, *Mill Tent*, *Seven Goldilocks* before she was *Miss in Egypt* (and what a pity she didn't do *Canary Bay*), but we were treated to her performance as Vera Charles in the distinguished ABC production of *Music Box*. Barry Humphries' *Woolly Bully* (a very lame performance as Rudolph the Water Boy) is the lead in

*Power's Rambos* and *Funny Girl*, followed by excellent work in *Frontiers*, *Priscilla*, 1973, and *A Little Night Music*. He holds the record for playing Frank Butler opposite four — as if *He*.

Anne Buckley.

John Lockwood, after many years in variety, played Ralph in *Oliver!* (the role originally intended for Gordon Clifton, and subsequently played elsewhere by John Marshall, Barry Humphries and Robin Kempton). Several years later, Lockwood appeared as the Major in the much-lauded *Cambridge Tales*, followed by the much less successful *When We Are Married* and *More Cambridge Tales*. His television success in *Number 94* has earned him a larger following, and he is currently continuing his tour of Britain, New Zealand, *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum*.

Nanette Newman used to hide behind the curtain as a 16 year old chorus girl in *My Fair Lady*, but she was dragged onstage long enough to score her first triumph as Holly LeBow in *How to Succeed* (1963).

After a string of British musical theatre roles, Hugues Gardien persuaded Nanette to audition for the lead in *Seven Charlie*. Her outstanding success in that led to many more exciting performances in such musicals as *Dames At Sea*, *Billy the Kid*, *Ragtime*, *Camaret* and *As You Like It*. Nancy's appearance in Richard Wherren's excellent production of *Alma DelGrazie's County Home* at the National

## Stage Anthology



# From COUNTRY GIRL to CHORUS LINE



Karen Carpenter in *Love Is Dance*

revealed that she may well become one of the country's greatest comic actresses should she ever decide to hang up her dancing shoes.

Alison Gibson burst onto the stage of Sydney's Phillips Theatre in the strange *Bitter Suite* in *One Girl, One Dog*, the rock musical version of *Twelfth Night*, and was granted with reviews that proclaimed her "a power-packed pocket-handkerchief" and "a radiant comic fireball". Alison currently reinvigorated the exclusive property of Sydney (read up Australia!) where she has delighted us in *Sold Out*, *Cabaret*, *Love Is Dance*, *Amber Got Your Gun* and the excellent *Maryan*. In a repeat of *I Del I Del* with Doug Langman.

When *Telegames* are required for musical comedy, the world of Opera contributes many a fine artiste. Jane Brookfield's rare musical comedy appearances have been for Giselle Carrillo, who presented her in *The Sound of Music* and her West End success *Rosemary & Elizabeth*. Susanne Steele made an extraordinary impact as Adelina in *Woman of the Year*, and Rosana Radford must be our foremost interpreter of Rodgers and Hammerstein, having argued in to "Clouds Every Mountain", explained the mysteries of "Tell It Fair", and asserted in "We'll Never Walk Alone". Mrs Brookfield also played June in the Melbourne production of Cole Porter's *Out of This World*.

Alwyn Leech was *Wormwood* at the *Mincing*, *Pal Joey*, and the royal *Lady Thiang* in the *Tessie* Show. *The King of Broadway*, followed by two charming performances for *ICW*, in Canterbury Tales and *1776*.

Of the pretty, sweet-voiced soprano who have graced our musical stages, Geraldine Murray has dominated the field

since playing the 16 year old Kim Macmillan in *My Fair Lady* (1961). With a formidable list of credits behind her in playing the title roles in *Early Mary Sunshine* and *Charlie Dorey*, Miss Murray is back in the spotlight after too long an absence, as one of the three stars of *State of Mind* by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Patty Hemmings has never been far behind her protégé's success, being Maria in *West Side Story* (including American import Wendy Whang), Lulu Barker in *One Lifetime*, Marnie and Dorothy in *The Antennae*, Rosalie, Judy Banks, Helen Zavalas, Marianne Howard, Rossa Coleman and Rosalie Howard have all made their mark in similar roles.

The individual contributions are countless, of the performers who come to this country usually with an imported company, and staying to colonise other productions, Carl Rashell,傅·贝瑞、Keith Lyndon, Al Thomas, Myron Noyack, Gordon Chase, Ross Craig, Bill Nichols, June Martin, Diana Gayley, Susan Svartland, Gordon Ryd, Keith Lee, Raymond Depari, Nathan Wilson and Romeo Arnold are a few that spring to mind.

The list of home-grown talents is one more daunting, but we can remember with pleasure some excellent work by Ruth Morrison, Bill Newman, Doug Langman, Rob Livermore, Barbara Wyndham, Paddy Mortimer, Bobby Healey, Jean Balyce, Will McManamy, David Rawnsdale, Bob Helseth, John Patterson, Joy Gisoldi (Westmoor), David Williams, Robina Beard, Judy Roberts, Lesley Baker, Tiki Taylor, Rod Dunbar, Denevere Douglas, Ben Werner, Joe Brink, Alan Harvey, Jamie Dargan, Jason Collier, Julie Warren, Sue Walker, Barker Snapp, Shirley May Donald, Peter Noble, John Neumeier, Graeme Best, Bill and Guy Donaldson, Jean Brookfield, Kevin Johnson, Michael Cason, David Sperring, Noel Mitchell, Terry Denevan, Jim Denys and Liz Harris.



Karen Carpenter



Geraldine Murray



Rosanna Radford



Jane Brookfield

# From COUNTRY GIRL to CHORUS LINE

Also not to be forgotten are the dramatic actors who have displayed stellar gifts on the musical stage most notably Jon Ivey, John Bowes, Murray Edwards, Max Phipps, Michael Freedman, Tatti McBernard, Nick Tate, Jon Penkivian, Michael Jaffre, Mary Harley, Brian Hansen, Alan Taber, Marge Lee, Gordon Gilmour, Tony Baker, Jane Harlow, Frank Lloyd, Judi Finn, Noel Ferrer, June Bourne, John Umbers and Frank Wilson.

And what of the future? Do we have a new breed of exciting young musical talents? You bet. A Chorus Line boasts at least five potential "stars". Pamela Gibbons is obviously only one step away from her own show, and David Abbott, Peter Toppino, Marianne Roper, Jack Webster and Karen Johnson have all collected themselves as strong talents in previous shows.

Gwendoline Turner, who played Perse in *A Little Night Music*, is the latest of our bewitched ladies, already strongly compared to Petronella. Although this only by way of compliment, her critics, as no mother always says, they just haven't written the show for her yet.

McBernard has Anna Phelan, who could switch from country-music-and-Carrie's Customer, the female star of *The Wizard of Oz*. She does, in fact, not only a wonderful singer but an accomplished actress to boot.

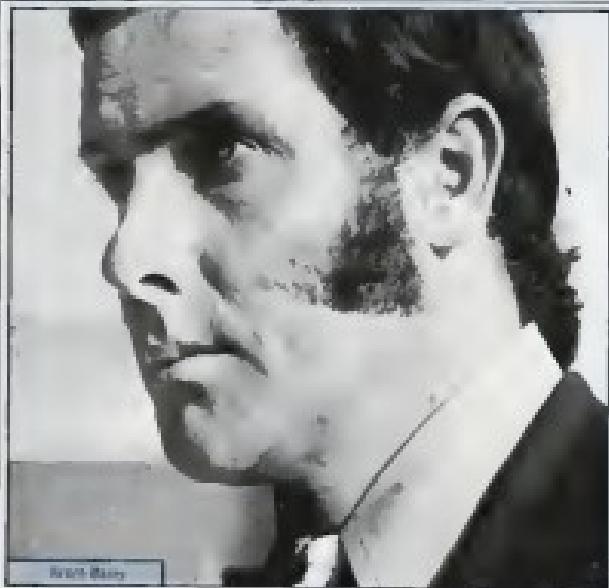


Janetize Sung was one of the many pleasures to be found in the short-lived *Maple Show* (1975), the first West Stage appearance she was to have played. Ken in the *Tess* Show production of *My Fair Lady* with Barry Cryeran and Gwen Plumb in 1982 but the whole enterprise folded prematurely, Mrs Sung remained a strong personality and a fine voice of comedy.

*Age Pages* a Country Whores Club does produced Stephen Thorne and Brenda Weston who could easily knock the Hutchinson-Hewitt team off their rock musical throne. Diana Lott a plump lady marinated in show business since birth, is a bundle of singing, dancing energy reminiscent of her mother, Gloria Dyan.

John McErlane, although primarily an actor, displayed exciting promise in *Grease* and *Grease II*, an Australian counterpart to *Grease*? Kerren Henderson replaced Sue Walker in the title role of *Grease* for several weeks to much acclaim; then was an creation when she again filled in for the ailing Karen McQuade in the last undiluted rock opera, *Mamma Mia!* at the Lyrician Theatre. And Judi Connell, in her musical comedy début as Mrs Harrington (she was to have played Edna in *Guys and Dolls*) was the mandarin starlet cast of *Applause* with Eric Andre. Miss Connell has since attained an electorate following in herself.

The future is bright at the moment, our top talent is on display in several hospitals around the country, and the atmosphere is congenial and conducive to creativity and achievement. So don't believe them when they say the musical theatre is dying, as long as a girl like Julie Anthony can be groomed for her first stage appearance by a handful of experts, win a standing ovation in the role only of a big musical like *Grease* and two years later, become a star in the West End (and I used to think would die in the barn - well, you can't win em all!) - as long as our managers can keep stars like that, there is no voice for alarm. Our next Gladys Moncrieff might be at the door right now, and New Year's Eve might come sooner than you think.



In the last issue of *Theatre Australia* the Theatre Royal's new air-conditioning system was described with a detailed insight into how it

Ross Thorne

# Sydney's Theatres Part 2



Empire alias Her Majesty's  
Theatre and Cinema

## The Empire alias Her Majesty's

The Empire Theatre opened at Queen Street on the last day of February 1921 with the first Australian performance of the musical comedy, *Auntie*. Ernest Röhl was in charge of the production but Bert Naylor was the governing director and managing force behind his own Thomas Ltd.

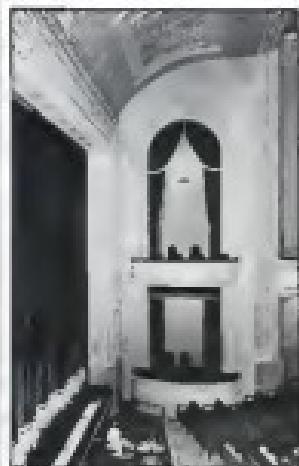
Röhl and Chard were the architects and they achieved a remarkable design for

the site. Probably no other site has had so many people squandered over it for theatrical presentations. The site not being quite square, the architect used a diagonal axis for the centre line of the auditorium and stage. Only enough space was left around the auditorium for a flat stage so house-escape stairs, dressing rooms on five floors and a massive entrance vestibule.

The stage was meant with the rear corners set off at 45 degrees by the external walls of the building (When the Australian Ballet performed the rear back drops possessed broken hanging battens which dropped away together in the stress before, thus patterning the drop sufficient for flying.) Although these faults caused the proscenium was a wide 42 feet, which was very suitable for opera and ballet.

In a fan shaped auditorium which was twice as wide as it was deep, 185 feet wide by 80 feet deep, there were 3,000 people seated on two levels. The angle of the side walls was over 132 degrees to the stage front which made it impossible for nearby parents to see the action on stage. (But they sold these seats for a third the price of the remainder.)

This rather cheap theatre, which was a sister project for the proscenium and the open boxes in the qualified form of the three circles, failed and became a cinema in 1929. It remained a second-run and 'Feature-film' cinema until 1949 when J.C. Williamson Theatre purchased it. It reopened as a live theatre in February that year with the Kings Theatre Company which

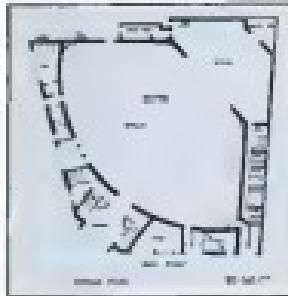


The Empire alias Her Majesty's  
Theatre and Cinema

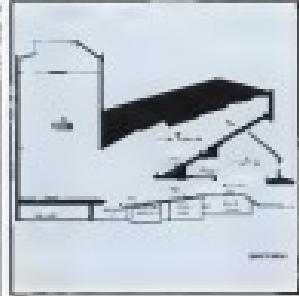
not for an amateur's delight.

Between 1930 and 1932 the Empire re-commenced its association with musical theatre, Gilbert and Sullivan, and ballet, including some presented by the Borovovsky Company. During the time, particularly for ballet, the tick books of seats remained empty but at the end of 1932 the theatre was closed for refitting and alterations.

In June 1933 the Empire reopened as South Pacific. Margaret Fonteyn performed with the Australian Ballet in 1937 but in 1944 the theatre closed again for five



Her Majesty's Theatre, 1921



Her Majesty's Theatre, 1921



*HMSO/PA* The new Theatre Royal, Bath, designed by John Madin, which has replaced the old building for performances and public meetings.

weeks for more restoration. It reopened under the new name of Her Majesty's. The capacity had been reduced to 1,728 persons. From the former licensed 2,515 in 1958. New side walls narrowed the auditorium and 2 traditional boxes had been constructed each side of the proscenium. A much needed pressroom layer now occupied space formerly held by the last row of the back stalls.

The opening production was *My Fair Lady*, which lasted 14 weeks. The Australian Ballet and Opera made their home here from 1961 and J.C. Williamson continued with musical productions and occasional special attractions such as the Sutherland-Williamson Opera Co. of 1963. At the height of the Australian Opera Season on 31 July 1970, the theatre was destroyed by fire.

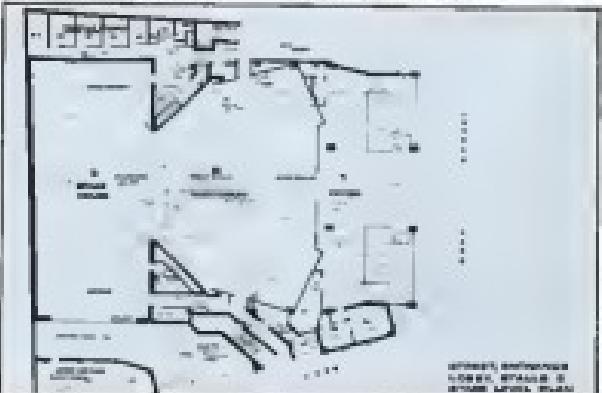
Willmottson considered other sites, including the Regent, but following his decision to move there Mr John W. Roberts and S.A. Biggs Pty Ltd were the architects and they ingeniously designed the theatre with the main square on to the Queen Street frontage. They maximized a rather shallow and comparatively small site so that adequate Royal boxes could be obtained on a visually exciting multi-level

plan. The larger dress circle extends high over the lower tiered seating, 90 feet from the stage. The stage is large with excellent vehicle access. Dressing rooms and other facilities are a distinct improvement on the old designs. The 1,400 patrons have a small restaurant and bar service in the foyer below ground level.

The new theatre opened with the rather unappreciated musical, *A Little Night Music*, on 26 November 1971.

The history of production by the amalgamated C. Williamson Theatres Ltd has closed this year after a century of business. It is hoped that both Her Majesty's and the Theatre Royal recruit sufficient professional expertise in production and public support to continue their long tradition.

*HMSO/PA* Site Plan of the original 1971. The modern extension was added in 1981.





JOHN BELL  
JENNIFER CLAIRE  
RALPH COTTERILL  
RONALD FALK  
BEN GABRIEL  
BRIAN SYRON in

# THE LOWER DEPTHS

by MAXIM GORKY

with Romanian Guests,  
LIVIU CIULEI, Director  
and HELMUT STURMER, Designer.  
DRAMA THEATRE, Sydney Opera House  
NOV. 2 - DEC. 20; NIGHTLY AT 7:30,  
SAT MATS AT 1:30.

PARADE THEATRE, Kensington  
JUDY CLARK, MICHELE FAWCETT,  
JOHN JARRATT, NEIL REOFERN,  
ROSS THOMPSON in

## OBSESSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN SMALL SPACES

by Ian Stacks and Robert Trebor Lang  
Director: RODNEY FISHER.

Designer: TONY TRIPP.  
NOV. 16 - JAN. 3; NIGHTLY AT 8,  
SAT MATS AT 2.

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## A contemporary classic done proud

### THE NORMAN CONQUESTS

BOB ELLIS

*The Norman Conquests*, Tadla Mansour, *Living Together, Round and Round the Garden* by Alan Ayckbourn, Old Tote Theatre Company, York Theatre, Seymour Centre, Sydney, NSW. Opened 3 August, 1977  
 Director, Robert Quasten; Designer, Larry Eastwood  
 Norman, Tony Denchley Jones; Anna, Yvonne Lang; Tom, Peter Adams; Ruth, Julie Fawcett; Reg, Alan Tolson; Ruth, Jennifer Huggett

*The Norman Conquests*, Alan Ayckbourn's triple-decker set of interlocking farces comedies (one taking place in the kitchen, one at the living room, and one in the garden of the one big house in Sussex over the next weekend) is among other things a celebration of several kinds of comic and amoral British theatre.

Norman, the spivious-faced suburban historian, raising deliciously against the confusions of British life, over much in

the Angry Young Men of the 1950s, much to their many scattered cousins of the 1960s, the Bedleys, Margays and Little Macaulays, and even more especially when played in London by Tom Courtenay, the great man's dead ringer, is the boozing, bickering comedy of D.H. Lawrence.

His loud, raucously raucous rage edition overruns from Stew and Russell back to Philo and Falstaff?

Again, the formal life-crushed and also blown of the first episode of his law, or your house Shakespeare *Antony and Cleopatra* — stuck in boozing Sussex, sending her in naked another and prizing for high comedy, and wryingly bawling in *Norman*, her exemplified, crazy brother-in-law, the top-top top of Peter Pan at his nadir.

Ruth his夫人, detached and accessitely liberated with a poor part Sarah Ferrier, eating her eggs for breakfast and not altogether losing the taste. Tom the absent-minded country boy and Anna's nursing grandfather editor, a loving essay on amateur dramatics, over much to Ferrier, silent comedy and Whitehall later, as do Sarah and Reg, the disreputable suburban couple, one white energetic torqued matronish drunkard, stilling and baying backslapper respectively.

On top of all the characters here about them the world of Ben Jonson's *Barber* — one mad with love, one magnified and crashing into furniture, one cripplingly shy one extremely dom, one overly heavy, one suddenly strength. The grumpy, drifting circumstances and thick

misunderstandings, on the other hand, owe much to Harold Pinter.

As a playwright, one might say, Ayckbourn is a pragmatist of genius, with audiences rarely happy for longer in his company, the TV likes of British comedy — what he needs is also enlarged into something such and fine.

As much as anything else his measure success is due to the accuracy with which he describes the self-obtuse of the suburban classes, all feel roughly left out and sold short by life each year for one bright spell of corruption to transfigure the cage in which they slowly lower.

Anna has fed for months on the dream of hot dairy weekend in Hastings with Norman. The virus immediately takes to Ruth, Gwendolyn, then intrusiveness prevail and the recognition without irony while Norman, the late force let loose in the household but, given a vegetable rural page, utterly delirious, the Ferriers, vegetation and animal life and having the women unhooked, vivified and glorified.

Reg, the chunky real estate agent, living joyously through *Norman*, signs her on to weekend and weekend extremes laughing like a clown. Tom, socially befogged, marshes at his usual technique Ruth, his amazement, thunderously calling wife, looks on him as a great untrained dog, who jumps up at anything that comes at him. Sarah, his matronish sister-in-law, sees him as an almost Mephistophelean threat to the innocence of house and home.



Tony Denchley Jones (Norman), Julie Fawcett (Sarah), Yvonne Lang (Anna), Jennifer Huggett (Ruth) and Alan Tolson (Reg) in *Table Manners*. Photo: Robert MacFarlane

But all of them carry his blundering, club-headed, vision-loving gusto. He, at least, will have a go (albeit in circumstances carefully prearranged by himself to ensure his total failure), and all in turn are almost worked in by his anti-distributional expressiveness for anything that's on.

A sharper critic than myself might see Norman as the Id, and the others as variations on the other members of Sigmund's dubious triad, or Norman as the Artistic Impulse of Death among the more human race, and he would, I think, be right.

But he would miss, I think, the point, which is that the play's through it did not go high. In six hours rather than the two which some fools still think it should be, the author has time to try exhaustively

with many ideas, to vary, alter and switch again and again in a single idea, to make some returning thoughts whoopeep over three plays apart. His old friend Quay play called *The Arabian Quayman*, would have been of small interest. The three plays we now have are, in toto, deservedly both in a class of their own.

With such an energetic show to start with, the cast would do less than be thundering best, and all as this cast do magnificently well, even when compared to the London versions which I saw, in which Michael Gambon's set, when I thought was incomparable on that basis, was no better than Peter Adams', whose amateurish bowdlerised title was like the sun setting up.

Jessica Hagan as Ruth, loud, brazenic and malicious by far surpasses her Lon-

don counterpart, a more snappy matinée, as did Alan Tatch, ungracious-bright and absurdly gorging in Big, an inspired piece of casting. As Anna, Veronique Lang was more valiant, I think, than good, working too maddeningly and forgetfully through too many years. As Norman Tony Llewellyn-Jones, bound to due course (but not believed to be Angelus's Oliver in my view), and I will be good money on the acoustic foreshadowing, showed much but not all of the great stage actor he is yet to be, robust, cheerful, childlike and ringing like Lear in the crescendo room, he mangled but did not surpass Tim Courtney's definitions, panting, heartach, adhesion. Robin Quay's production was very very good and Terry Entwistle's settings lovely. In at a good price, close proud and with culture love.



John Gaden (left) and Geraldine Turner (Anne) in Norman's production of *ASHES*

## Fine, frank and poignant performances by Gaden and Turner

### ASHES

KATHERINE BRISBANE

*Ashes* by David Rindt. *Normand Doversant*, Sydney, NSW. Opened 12 October 1977.  
Director, Ken Haslett  
Cast, John Gaden, Anne, Geraldine Turner, David At, Alan Baddeley, Nuria de, Suzanne Rayner

Norman Dowdeman is beginning to assume a character which audiences can count as a real asset to the Married Theatre — no longer a sense of secondary importance but offering a different and from time to time even a more valuable competence.

It has grown naturally out of the trial and error efforts which with the help of Shakespeare have evolved into a new style of acting theatre boasting significant performances like Peter Carroll in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Christmas Brothers*, John Gaden in *Twelfth Night* and Gordon Chater in *The Education of Robert Franklin*.

Dowdeman's special quality is that it is a very private place; it responds by a sharing of personal fantasy, dreams, resilience and

so on — in fact to the expression of vulnerability in which actors such as we saw in Cheek's performance, in Tony Sheldon as the speechless boy in *Jesus Fossils*, and Max Collier in *A Streetcar of the Assassins*.

So David Rindt's highly confessional play, *Ashes* — in part the story of a children couple's attempts to conceive, in part an epiphany for Ireland, divided by violence from her heritage — is well placed in this sympathetic environment. And it is a pleasure to welcome back John Gaden to Normand in the role of the unashamed bairn.

In the 70s Australian audiences have become accustomed to a style of personal confession in the largely domestic content of our play writing. *Ashes* is a document in

the same grace and a more intimate or intimate form than any of our authors have dared — or wanted — their writing to be.

At the same time it gathers the personal experience into the novel experience of a generation which has no alternative but to look forward despondently from the ashes of one social system to the conception of another.

Colin Harding, a teacher from County Antrim, is living in an English country town with his wife Anna. They have moved from the city numbered to start a new life of a more natural and contemplative kind and to start a family. Surrounded by harpooning parenthood, so often wantonly started — Colin and Anna are unable to "click" as they call it. There follows a humiliating round of sperm counts, urine tests and gynaecologists' advice on rhythms and dosages and sexual positions.

Honorably supported by a sense of honour, an education and a genuine belief in the family as a natural order, Anna and Colin in their own way, witness a pregnancy. It requires some measure of bad luck and ends in failure.

The death of the child coincides with the death of a relation in a brilliant beach blouse and in a long and moving monologue Colin describes the painful courage of the survivors.

In the subsequent funeral ceremony, confronted by what he sees as stubborn men and women destroying future hope in marriage for past failures, he unrolls the bands with his own courage. The image of blood is strong in the play — but not as a source of strength and unity but as a poison destroying the child and destroying the family.

To place the power lies in the hands of the bloodless bureaucracy — the National Health, the politicians and at the last scene the council adoption service.

In its way, *A Marriage* is another example of a kind of gay nonsense among British writers in the last 60s and early 70s which make a plea for general peace and what they see as a simple and kind of life.

*A Marriage* has two very fine, frank and poignant performances by Geraldine Turner and John Colicos and the play is worth seeing for that alone. Under Ken Horan's direction they share the acutely felt problems of the play honestly well for audience and the audience responds in like fashion.

In this the play was supported with elegance and refinement by Susanna Boyce and Alan Baden as the rest of the characters — nurses, doctors, morticians, ambulance men and the like.

They capture our attention, and our feelings and leave us a little more aware of our fellow human animals, a playwright can ask no more than that. Potted might have done better to choose the intimacy and sympathetic audience of the Downstairs for its flesh, currently a prima and equally a city for help of another kind of destructive predicament.

## Marriage! message! medium?

### A MARRIAGE

REN GRANPHOM

*A Marriage* by Philip Morris. Ensemble Theatre, Sydney, NSW. Opened September 1971. Director, Hayes Gaskins; designer, Brian Mackinnon. Richard, Joe Jason, Amanda, Christine Woodland, Angie, Carol Passmore, Chris, Lester, Coffey, Oliver, Peter Williams, Paul, Mark Held.

Reduced to its bare bones, *A Marriage* is about a writer who loves his wife for his young research assistant and then leaves the research assistant for his wife's close "best friend". The play's brevity is its central point of view: the writer's prognosis is a discovery that his work, intermingled with a little pleasure that is accompanied with emotional responsibility, is more important to him than either marriage or love.

Work and pleasure are given reverberating definitions, in worked-off monologues, by the writer and the other friend, love is not only acknowledged, but also represented in a generally negative light in the family relationships, sexual attempts, lies and rows staged by the women who have been "abandoned".

The negative aspect is really only reflected by the note of baptismal devotion and patience accorded by the wife — for twenty-year "investment" in marriage leaves her unable to do anything but wait for her husband's return. The rather refreshing point of view doesn't begin to declare itself until halfway through the second half and until it does I was finding impatient with what seemed to be a very rarefied theatrical living-room piece.

And that brings me to my main problem — the genre. The play seems to have a sort of action, personal feeling, almost, and single theme, an analog in *La vita è bella* on the part of the author, Philip Morris. But it is evidently squeezed into the mould of auto-analytic comedy.

Only a few weeks ago I saw a play at Kilburn which gave me just the same impression (Wayne Mitzell). It is perhaps explained by the fact that the writer concerned has done most of their work for television.

*A Marriage* is a much more interesting and, in a point of view, original play than *Wayne Mitzell* but the game is substantially the same — middle-class marital conflict with special emphasis on the area of sexual fidelity presented in an acutely manner of living-room realism and one-line gags.

I had the impression, as the audience laughed with cheerful precision, that dialogue of this kind has become a convention of entertainment — that the shape of the lines, their intonation, length and so on, irrespective of their verbal content, is

as recognizable a cue for audience response as a card with "Tough" written on it and that for all concerned, audience, actors, writer, a steady pattern of gag Come and laugh responses is all that holds the occasion together and stops it degenerating into various kinds of chaos and darkness — boredom, incomprehensibility, silence.

The gag after I the only hardly fatal consequence in repetition. Action is rapidly confined to drinking and sole-piveling. But a gag that doesn't seem to alienate the audience can be that they go home and post sections and sit on sofa and put up their feet and sing it out going for gag to fail the heartbreak like those absurd markings on the stage?

Of course they don't. This is just a play and these conventions are just a transparent, sugar-coated medium in which small doses of thought and feeling can be painlessly administered by skillful writing. I have my problems but I have an allergy to the medium which interferes with my enjoyment of the readings.

Contrast *A Marriage* with the Neil Simon play presented by the Ensemble earlier this year. The behavior is entirely different — Neil Simon writes dialogue comedies which have a firm base in psychological truth and realistic observation but they never leave one in any doubt that the outcome is comic. *A Marriage* makes me feel that it would like to be a serious play but doesn't think anyone would listen. And it's too even a gag and approachlessness are unusual — look at Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, where they spring naturally from character and situation and never give the impression of being imposed to make the material palatable.

With the limitations of the genre, the production was efficient and I liked Carol Passmore as the wife.

## Engaging holiday entertainment

### A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM

NORMAN KESSELL

*A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum*, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Bertolt Brecht and Larry Gelbart. Marion Street Theatre, Kilburn, NSW. Opened 14 October 1971. Director, Martin Danner; designer, Boles Nekluda; choreographer, Brian Coughlan; musical director, Phillip Scott; Pseudolus, Polking Lockwood, Prudence Jill Howard, Alex Keenan, Sora, Big Gloom, Dorothy, Barbara Farrell, Hora, Tony Sheldon, Hyderlina, Peter Whittford, Lynn, Garth Mead, Tambourine, Steele Edwards, Paracus, Barbara Farrell, Gymnastics, Patricia Howson, Phila, Jennifer McGregor, Erroneus, John Larling, Miles Gloriosus, Peter Merrell.

Today, Stephen Sanderson is the most heralded household name among theatregoers. His well-publicised visit to Australia earlier this year for the Asia International Music Theatre Forum, the opening of Sydney's new His Majesty's Theatre with *It's A Lovely Night Music* and now the final accolade, his name on the marquee of the title of a show, *Side By Side By Side*, have seen to that.

It was not always so. When West Australian was at the Sydney Theatre in 1984, the program included biographies of original choreographer Jerome Robbins, composer Leonard Bernstein, director Joe Calva, choreographer Bob Fosse and musical conductor Deems Taylor, but lyrical Sanderson was only a line in the credits.

He fared slightly better as campagneur of *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum* when it opened at Sydney at the old Theatre Royal in 1984, but as was usual at the time, it was the performers who were talked about and remembered.

They were Jack Conner as Pseudolus, the slave who wants to earn his freedom by convincing to take his young master, Holo, played by Jack Conner, with the three girls. Phoebe played by Geraldine Mervin, Clifton Molina as Hyrcanus, the slave of Holo's master, Sosia (Richard Webber) and Durus (Pauline Daniels) with Holo's memory at the back godkiller Lucas, and the last Will Mahoney as Erucius, a Roman general making a son and daughter violin party extract by grace.

Although it has a witty and what was in the '80s an unusually breezy book by Ben Shephard and Larry Gelbart, it is not a particularly good example of Sanderson's work, though it includes two of those he has frequently used numbers.

The team, however, is right for revival and while Alastair Dallas's new production at Sydney's Human St. Theatre may lack some of the fire and polish of other revivals he has staged, it offers engaging holiday season entertainment. It is also a good wood-up to another successful year for the most enterprising of regional theatres.

True, *another Australian*'s *Footloose*? It is not, partly because the casting is less even and the direction less well balanced, but it has been admirably adapted for a smaller company and performance should prove smoother in the run proceedings.

For a start, it has the inimitable Johnny Lockwood bringing all his comedy expertise and clowning skills to the marionette role of Pseudolus. He copes well with the difficult task of opening the show single-handed — a clearly improvisatory device unjoined by the writers which could well be abandoned — thus presenting strongly to introduce the night's plot. He has the less obvious of Sanderson's tricky lyrics to negotiate and handles them with admirable clarity and precision, especially in the song, "Free".

An even better performance, however, comes from Peter Wherred as Hyrcanus. His comedy timing is impeccable and his singing of the number, "I'm Cain", is the

evening's highlight. Wherred also shares a show-stopping double with Lockwood in the comedy caprice of the song, "Lively", which for night I was then not the audience shouting "Manc!"

Vocalist Tony Sheldon is excellent as the inveterate Herk, but I found Jennifer McGregor a disappointing Phoebe, both dramatically and vocally. Rehearsing her fine performance in the title role of the Old Town Theatre Company production of Jack Hofsiss's *A Taste To The Mob*, I could not help wondering whether her voice may have suffered from her recent spell in the smoke-filled atmosphere of Sydney's first pub theatre.

Peter Meredith does well as the ingugy singer, Miles Glorioso, while Reg Gillies scores as Sosia and Gareth Mende as Lucas. Especially pleasing are the ill Howard and Alex Kavous as the two lost Proteus, who enjoy a wide variety of rather roles.

Designer Brian Pocklett's sparse and squat setting of a series of rooms free of the houses of Erucius, Sosia and Lucas is less imaginative than usual. It also provides little freedom for the plentiful pursuits of the final scenes. Even through the central double doors, at particular, seemed fraught with potential disaster. The costumes, executed by Tony White, are, on the other hand, excellent.

And once again, as with other revivals at this theatre, the performance overmuch to the first-class support (here notably director Philip Scott, at the piano, with Craig Scott on bass and Craig Collinge on percussion).

## An excellent production

### THE LOWER DEPTHS

JOHN MCCALLUM

*The Lower Depths*, by Maxim Gorky, stage version after the translation by Eily Hauer-Barry and Jossing Brooks, Old Town Theatre Company at the Opera House Drama Theatre, Sydney, NSW Opened 2 November 1987

Director, Lyn Chole; assistant director, Ken Chapple; designer, Michael Scammarth; lighting, Jerry Lake; costume, John Faure; costume, Jennifer Chole; makeup, Kris McQuade; production, Tom Farley, Pepl; Trevor Kent; kitchen, Ralph Costello; Anna Bell; Ursula, Savita; Kate Ferguson; Aspinwall, Maggie Kirkpatrick; Justice, Gordon McDonald; Rivers, Ronald Full; Sam, John Bell; Actice Brian Byrne; Luis, Ben Gabriel; Alyasha, Dallas Lewis; Tzar, Laurence Hodge; Krupp, Zeb; Chris Oberland performer and various players, Stephen O'Rourke; Stage Manager, Sandra

Gross, Souja Taffi; Box Office, Patricia Rose; Sound, Geoffry; Janey Morgan; Terry Cleary (From 29 November to 7 December inclusive); Steven, Stephen O'Rourke)

The first thing that needs to be said is how good it is that this play has been done. Doubts about the Tzar's chaotic of programme, such an area from time to time, must be swept away — at least for the time being. *The Lower Depths* is a masterpiece which has not been seen before in Sydney. It is a rich and complex work, dealing with the lives of a group of people living in poverty down and out in a cellar in a Russian slum.

There is one much plot out of the lodgers, Pepl, who is having an affair with the landlady, Irushka, has returned to her younger sister, a woman too dying of consumption which her gaunt slender Irushka tries to avoid her, is broken down alcoholics after years to get away and start a new life but finally gives up in despair.

A great deal seems to happen in the shadowy spaces between misery, happiness, bitterness and tenderness.

Irina, an old peasant, returns into the cellar, runs up the community, precipitates a number of crises and leaves them all sorted but no more well off. In theory he tells them beautiful lies that will make their miserable lives more bearable, but the only results of his intervention are two broken romances, a murder and a suicide.

Perhaps not quite the only results. At least three characters — Nadya, the prostitute, the Baron, a false aristocrat, and particularly the worldly but decent Seta — are recruited to a new sense of value in their otherwise rather hopeless lives.

This production, one as rich and complex, and again, any doubts about inspiring good directors from overseas (such as were cited, for example, at the 1987 Playwrights' Conference) must be removed entirely by Lyn Chole's fine work with the excellent cast. The production is robust and straightforward, full of physical business and stimulating theatrical ideas. Those who know the play will get a sense of that from stage like Pepl's violent afflition to vomit at Anna's table, the brawled Irushka's unnecessary hands over the body and Nadya sitting alone, what appeared to be popping out of a paper cone while listening to Nadya's romantic love story. The set is large and complicated, with many levels, and there is a great deal of raising and lowering.

Other competitive idea, perhaps require some justification. The shambles of the outside setting at Act III (especially with the elaborate set) could easily give a lesser production a giddy ramshackle which this avoids by sheer drive and purpose, and by the set's capacity to take many different planes of action at once.

The Actor wandering around, clutching his possessions among his shaggy comings before he suicide was almost hairy-handed, as was the affair at the end

between Kostchka and Alyosha. The posts they're by these relationships are perhaps unnecessary, but the very fact that they're added at all is a tribute to the subtlety of the production and the care that constitutes a demands.

A play such as this depends a great deal on individual performances, for it is in these that Goethe's marvellous wit is not buried, for the play is either glibly and spite of sententious about life, mortified themselves, in the case there is no one who can be trusted, and if it remains a fine here as standing out in a only lack of spirit that prevents its remaining more.

Ken McQuade as Natacha has a certain which releases at times into enthusiasm to tell, to have out at the end quite marvellously Ralph Cosentini's Kostchka is perfect, and surely his best performance

this year. Kate Ferguson brings to Kotsya an ageing combination of obstinacy and vulnerability which is very moving, in Ronald Falk's final shuffle off the stage, at the Harpy, to his father. And Brian Sykes gives us, in one, surprising interpretation of the Actor which is hardly an elderly outworn thumebone of the character.

The performances which are central now, he mentioned John Bell as Sora Blaschkowsky's part — it must be said carries what might be called the philosophical weight of the play — and carries it very well. Bell has a sense of the performer about him which does I quite fit with the constrained realism of the play and which only an artist of his experience and emotional understanding could make work so well.

The other is Ben Gubriel as Lukas, the most important character in the play. Here

I can only say I found his interpretation too low-key and understated, lacking in inspirational strength although excellently done. Perhaps I expect too much of Lukas.

This production has something which we don't see a lot of. It is long and thoughtful and demands attention. I disagree with the emphasis of the programme, which focuses entirely on the director aspect.

What the play often is a study of values — felt and looked for — in the lives of people whose social conviction serves merely as a dynamic way of focusing attention on how a personal sense of value can be lost or found. There can be no one who views this show sensitively who does not come out of the theatre wiser and more thoughtful, as well as well informed, and that is one thing no soup kitchen is for.



Miriam Kirkpatrick (bottom) and John Bell (above) in *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky, which is the Old Town Theatre Company's tenth production at the Geelong Theatre of the Sydney Opera House (1971).



## Moments of insight among the four-letter words

### SOUTHERN APE

MARGOT LAKE

*Southern Ape* by Bob Clarke, National Theatre Company, Greenwood Opened 28 October 1977

Director, Andrew Ross

Edgar, Len Layton, Sisay, Ashlie Lewis, Marvel, Leah Taylor, David, Peter Fisher, Tim, Peter Brown, Maura, Igor Stav.

At the Playhouse this month it has been possible to study characteristically opposed attitudes to playwriting. In the main theatre there was *The Brass Hat*, a compact, coolly calculated play, mixing a number of formulaic ingredients and achieving a slick

adolescence. One was not precisely bored, but rather felt alienated by the music that was doled up in the post of contemporary relevance.

Precisely those qualities threw two stark contrast Bob Clarke's *Southern Ape*, presented in the Greenwood. It is not a good play, but when it attempts to work along, it is the playwright's first professional appearance after winning a range of local press fit writer's work presented by amateur groups.

Clarke has good dramatic instincts but seems to lack judgement concerning specific aims. He plays violence and honest in its importance; to capture and make comprehensible to an audience (and undoubtedly himself) the strange world of today's teenagers, a world which he himself has felt to be "like going to a strange land".

In presenting his young and not quite human primitives (the same *Southern Ape* is taken from Brewster's explanation of the Australopithecus), Clarke was clearly aware that a wider perspective was needed

Having four characters communicating largely in four-letter words and aggressive fisting (male) or giggling (female), no matter how accurately observed, does invite severe reservations on a playwright.

The contrasting bits provided are theatrically well suited to the job. They are, firstly, an ageing dropout with the gift of the gab, unashamedly adulated by the teenagers, so that he can get close enough to see what is going on, at the same time keeping an adult view on the events and their significance. The other adult, a middle-aged engineer with generation gap problems, is developed in less detail, but carries more dramatic weight and credibility.

The play starts with Edgar, the ageing eccentric introducing himself, and setting many a mouth on edge. If this is supposed to be the spokesman for the adult world, one feels a curiously and sadly unnatural sense of alienation. He presents a series of acrobatic and burlesque umbrella, taking bonyish rubbish with an elephantine sense of humour reminiscent of 19th century



Australia, but at the same time being thoroughly modern in discussing his family lot and living cash.

In the programme he is introduced as follows — "your master of ceremonies for the evening". I present a verse only as I said, for Edgar could be you and me and a composite of the many and various other voices of authority to which our kids are constantly subjected".

This is clearly someone. The fact that he's getting on a bit does not make him an establishment or authority figure. He also smokes grass, gets beaten and makes anti-violent (homosexual) propositions. As a study of a psychological curiosity, it is Benjamin Franklin, he might have some point (except for the fact that he can't much mix with Biff) but as a character, Edgar is obscure and irrelevant instead of illuminating.

The central factors start the play off on the wrong foot, and serve as an impediment to the kind of balance the playwright is aiming at, and one wonders, after a while, whether a "quid" or "memento" strategy

Because the treatment of the kids is parental, direct and creditable. Denying their cakes at Tom's cafe they exchange a dialogue that is totally real and totally relevant. The girls, giggling with a lot of protective body-language, name the young kids, David, who (as played by Peter Fisher), looks and moves as a startlingly apish woman. The precise nature of children "I dare you" games and fully-developed sexuality is faintly suggested in the programme illustration, showing the rear view of a girl's well-lit pubic zone, wobbly adolescent body, and noting a bodily-bean changing by size of fist.

The exact kind of generalisation and revealing comment in these scenes probably overdoes the point: specific-pattern expert, but of course the audience repetition is necessary to establish poverty of thought and economy of existence embedded in these seemingly uninterchangeable perceptions of both, she and you are the masters of insight.

No idle here are the verbal skirmishes between Susie and David, which serve as a prelude to their meeting. It is no point as a gauge of others — the physical grapple, the moral outrage and social pressure (gender, mother), the giving in, later followed by the sudden gaining of status by both, and eventually the disorientation and return to routine domesticity.

There is also the dialogue between the two girls discussing sexual initiation, which has a refreshing honest sense of humour, as the two boys (aged like David and first-generation migrant Marco) discussing Australian attitudes to women, freely mixing and Marco's bleak image of a deeply rough uniform Australia stretching all the way from WA to Queensland without any promise of better things. There is also some relief from banter banality in the first cautious stages of the relationship between Marco (the more idealistic of the two girls) and Marco,

showing the helpless inadequacy of communication when more complex pretensions, such as Marco's frustrated attempt to communicate, are sought on.

In the second half of the play, with the pairing of Igo, the thuggish psychopath of the younger years to have been exhausted, and the lone shik to the figure of Tom, the Indian cult propagator. In the first half he had been a background figure, stereotype Indian, thick accent, short tempered with the customers and too demanding of labour.

In the second half, which starts with a very drunk Edgar attempting to roll a joint at one of Tom's tables, it becomes clear that the lack of understanding between Tom and Igo is a proxy for Tom's and Alannah's adamant that Edgar smokes his grass elsewhere, he doesn't see him as a link with the world of the kids, and he opens up, telling Edgar of his frustrations and remissness about the past.

The overt hostility between father and son explodes into open warfare between the generations in a startlingly painful scene a little later. It starts with a round-table squabble between Susie and David and when Tom intervenes with his off-fathered tones of authority, pleading that they be "tame to each other" all that turns on him, has an exultation, at first agreeing with him, then openly indicating, and finally turning it into an act of ritual handshaking that is even more meaningful than any agreement with a broken hand, could ever be.

The jump from that scene to Tom's suicide (barely indicated by a "closed" sign as one of the cue charts) is genuinely shocking, as is the appearance of Marco, dressed in European black and accepting the taciturnal condolences of the others "Bummer," they say, with compassion "Yeah, business."

In an epitaph the Edgar figure accepts criticism by labelling himself a phony and his comments as "pam-weak". This is a fully self-indulgent II, at a late stage, the playwright realises he had made a mistake, he should have scrapped the thing and started again. And it is a particularly successful point is launched, potentially at odds again, through the form probably restricted to the small experimental scene.

The play's aims and failures are interesting. It wishes to create a world that is alien to the author, and fascinated her. Authorised in her own responses to create a subversive, as father sees, but her facility of clear-eyed observation is more reliable when applied to the "strangers" than to her own insights.

Even so, he uses his characters as figures, rather than people. This does not allow for much interpretation by the actors. Adele Lewin as Susie is the survivor, boyish — tough and sharp. Leah Taylor as Marco is allowed an area of vulnerability that makes her a potential drug-addict. Peter Fisher's monotic David makes a good deal on the age restriction (never observing sheep, really), variously alternating with cocky aggression and realistically

unrelated chiding. The two Indians have the most graceful parts. Igo Bowen, as Tom, is allowed a range of emotion, from helplessness merely to the exhaustion of a man at the end of his tether, whereas Igo Su as Marco has to suggest matched intelligence game face — the pursuing student deserved to working at the side, unable to shake the "King" stage, and failing to drugs for solace.

Andrew Ross is a very "physical" director, and it is easy to see why this play appealed to him — the characters express more with their bodies than their vocabulary project, and it is the aspect of the production that stays most clearly in the mind.

## Doing more than justice to the play

### THE BRASS HAT

HILL DUNSTONE

*The Brass Hat* by Thomas Mischamp National Theatre Company at the Playhouse, Perth, WA  
Director, Anne Neeson; designer, Anna French

13 Colonial Guy Holden, DSO, MC; Alan Cawse, Clinton, Rosemary Barr, Major George Bradley, Robert Fuggetta; Freida John Brown, MM; Leslie Wright, Major General Charles Anderson-Green, CB, CBE, DSO, MC; (Reeds, Geoff Gibbons)

The production of Thomas Mischamp's *The Brass Hat* at the Playhouse does more than justice, I suspect, to a play which deserves hardly any drama for its few high spots, and which seems oddly out of the mark in its portrayal of human nature. The play after all is set in outer and isolated "Russia" that Boris Zeldis so thoroughly took apart some hundred years ago, concluding because, for all its appearance of documentary and psychological "realism," the play seems to start to be no more than an old-fashioned exercise in Gothic horror.

Its characters have no reality out of their immediate setting, and their psychology can have but limited relevance to humanity in general. Director Anne Neeson and her cast almost succeed in reversing the implausibility of the play, and manage to sell it as a situation drama which catches the attention for the moment, but doesn't bear reflection.

Thomas Mischamp (who is really a Catherine Lloyd-Thomson) believes, according to the programme note, that "what she has to say is in the text of her play." I conjecture, therefore, that the play attempts to create a sense of the horrific by amplifying all human motivation and fueling to various forms of natural rapacity, and by suggesting a link between the tactics of modern political warfare and the tactics which operate in the private lives of



Ross in Barr, Mrs. Lassal and their brigadier in *National Thunder*. *The Brass-Hat*

certainly found high ranking military personnel. This idea could, in itself, be quite valuable, but the play makes no point basically and with sangest, "ironical," if the pun may be excused.

The play comes at us out of private offices, arising out of a triangular relationship in which a Brigadier's wife and his mistress are rivals for the heart and mind of the Brigadier. This situation is presented largely but implausibly, and the writing of the male roles is particularly odd.

The brigadier, who has the reputation of having been a "butcher," assumes the role of passive victim, which is quite out of character with his past. As well, the hierarchical aspect of this military "version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*" is presented emasculated and superficially. The relationship between the two men is never clearly defined, so that one is perhaps not supposed to wonder why the former is suddenly ready to tell all his secrets, and why the wife has waited until the present moment to assert her pre-emptive rights over her husband. The situation is deployed through a series of interchanges and spaces ("gaps") which are poorly motivated psychically, and which are introduced somewhat arbitrarily into the action.

The play also makes much of the conflicting demands of rough justice and mercy in military warfare, focusing on an action commanded by the Brigadier and his mistress in the war against the Malayan insur-

regeants. Again, the play fails to convince. Regimental honour and the likeable cause prevail over humanity and decency, and the blame for the atrocity (which is re-enacted in flashback) is laid on the insurgents and the lower ranks, in particular the Indians.

Oddly enough, there some bright spots about the marriage of the Brigadier and his wife fifteen years later, when they are at the point of retirement. Malicious? I cannot decide whether the author intended that pattern to be taken ironically or not.

Despite all this, Anne North's production is considerably more promising than much we have seen at the Playhouse this year, and some part of this improvement must be due to the notable presence of Ross Barr, who has returned to the Playhouse to play Cleopatra, the Brigadier's wife.

Mrs Barr's performance brings out the calculated belligerency of the past, and her cool determination carries the dialogue over some very thin patches. The role of Guy Holden, recently promoted to Brigadier, allows Alan Cressell slight scope for his undoubted talents. Robert Fawcett looks a little in military bearing but Major George Whitley, the paragon of the right sense of pre-emptive morality in the officer who is finally persuaded to risk his conscience in favour of the regimental honour.

Goeff Gadsby, though always an unforced and convincing actor, is a trifle too bland, in my opinion, in the crusty, callous

and General Anderson-Green, who is, in a sense, the leading arch-villain of the piece. Leslie Wright succeeds in making some of the陪衬ing parts of the business, Private John Brown, bringing out sufficient pathos to make the remaining psychological violence of the character acceptable.

Clearly, recognisability of circumstances in the social webwork of the setting and the production did well to concentrate on other elements, notably suspense and plot.

Anne Freyfritz's designs for the setting, a gloomy, colourless drawing room in the Brigadier's quarters, was suitably dreachess to mood. The instant flashbacks, using perspective lighting effects with one character looking in silhouette were admirably handled from the technical point of view, but I found these conventions to be inconsistent with the apparent realism of the set and action.

One might wonder, finally, why *The Brass-Hat* was chosen. Presumably, it was hoped that the play's satiric morality would appeal to a certain segment of the population and, after all, the play is valiant enough to pass as "Stringybark," and has had a controversial airing elsewhere in Australia. But one wishes that the Playhouse would not focus all of its adventurous work to the tiny Gross Rose, and abandon the main house almost exclusively to spectacles such as *The Brass Hat*.



## Illyria in the South Seas

### TWELFTH NIGHT

MARGUERITE WELLS

*Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare

Camber Repertory at Theatre 3, Canberra, A.C.T. Opened 6 October 1977  
Director, Ross McGregor; Original music, Andrew May; set design, Terry Woodcock; Costumes, Lighting design, Michael Crawford.

Rip now holds the record for the smallest Illyria ever. It is an Illyria where the Lady Olivia spends her time sunbathing beside her over-muscled-limbed beau and where the Duke Orsino watches her avidly from the rear house in the coconut grove where he holds sway, (literally), over his ruled kingdom.

The wings of the stage, like a series of deep trapèze sets 4-metres wide, took up the width of the Theatre 3 acting area, leaving only the revolving stage as the 'island paradise' of Illyria, where Sir Andrew Aguecheek (in just a loincloth) as an apoplectic boor and son of his challenge on a distorted typewriter, and where Mariana Fauna and her crewmates hide from their visitors and passengers in a heap of coconut palms conveniently bent by curved pivoting walls that seem to come from those directions at once, so that they form a very clumsy pyramid and an easy runway into Orsino's rear house.

It was a brilliant set that solved the problems of the acting area with simplicity, saving the full height of the building, and kept the action concentrated and compact, where a flat for grandpas, that Rip tends to display, might have splurged it all over the stage. Only the colour shop, which began the play with a play and end in the coconut grove, was a cocoon which elicited a few Oohs and 'Oh how sweet!' from the audience and was just a little too quiet.

A revolving island paradise with frangipani trees and coconut palms and all looks good from all angles when the cast is bunging from those coconut trees and scrabbling up ladders and leaping in character leaps.

Its variety was endless and even if other aspects of the production had not been up to scratch, the inventiveness of the complex and compact set would have gone a long way to salvaging it.

But it didn't need salvaging. If Shakespeare had found any reason why Orsina's abdication should not be on a South Sea Island, I couldn't.

When Olivia is a vivacious, totally blind without her glasses, and Mariana Fauna, in gaudy pants and various choice butterflies, when Malvolio is impaled in a gleaming P and Q steward's uniform, with yellow stockings and cross piping of pants, it's all good clean theatrical fun. When Antonio, the devoted friend of the shipwrecked Sebastian, pretends he has an super-camp style and when the officers of the New York up in Pale Dame night ceremonial hand dresses, one with a

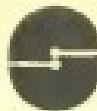
Chinese accent and one with an Indian accent, though everyone else wears resort clothing and speaks with Australian Shakespearean accents, one begins to feel that the good clean fun has just a hair out of hand.

If you can dismiss performances of racism and sexism like these, then Ross McGregor's adaptation works. It is extremely well thought out, each character has great potential, complementing or supplementing the text.

Only during the first speech did one have the impression that this was a studion of words rather than a piece of theatre. It was a piece of theatre and a charming one.



Nat Manning (left) is lashed to a spar with Bill Kerle (Antonio) in Canberra Rep's *Twelfth Night*.



## A memorable production

### MACBETH

TONY BAKER

*Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. South Australian Theatre at the Playhouse, Adelaide, S.A. Opened 28 October 1977. Director, Colin George. Asst Director, Ross Blair. Designer, Hugh Colman. Asst Designer, Ann Baker. Choreography and Light design, Michael Feller.

Duncan, Brian James; Malcolm, Donaldson; Fleance, Pauline; Macbeth, Edwin Hodgeman; Banquo, Leslie Bayman; Ralph, Craig Ashley; Lennox, Steven Baker; Angus, Keith Kennedy; Fleance, Michael Freudenthal; Macduff, Bruce Birney; Son of Macduff, Young Sceward, Colin Fresh; English Doctor, Michael Feller; Scottish Doctor, John Pearce; Witches, Karen Milin, Myra Hoblett, Michael Siberry; Lady Macbeth, Douglas Grey; Lady Muriel, Helen; Barbara West; Lord, Soldiers Attendants etc., Michael Feller; John Francis, Steven Baker, Karen Kennedy, Michael Freudenthal, Christine McNaughton.

Adelaide units neatly divided on the South Australian Theatre Company's production of *Macbeth*. The Advertiser's Alan Roberts coached for the superstitious, The Advertiser's Peter Ward found fault with the major performances and thought the production "boldly and dramatically conceived". Such a divergence of opinion is, in fact, understandable.

Colin George's first Shakespearean production with the SATC is an exciting reworking of an extraordinary production.

First the setting. The stage is dominated by a huge and bleak cage or stockade with gates that open to allow the entrance of cast, horses, stars and banqueting paraphernalia. It is simple and thumping, apt enough for a play about fate and people who are calmed, coddled, comforted, bound in. Designer Hugh Colman's conception is an effective one.

Then the costumes. The wretched Scots wear rugged, coarse and variously patterned kilts, at other times robes that make them resemble Tartar pretenders or shells consisting of a Marri-Birdie system. Duncan is carried around on a chair with panels woven and the witches sport shawls that could be Mediterranean or even African.

The effect is rather as if some of the more exotic aspects of the Adelaide Festival had arrived in town four months ahead of schedule. It is proposed one observer to remark that the interpretation to do Banquo's word in these circumstances is however must have been considerable.

Now is the goryology only visual. Two of the world masters are well indeed. They are Karen Milin and Michael Siberry. The other is a woman, Mary Hoblett. They appear throughout the play in other roles, too, as the incubitants and, amazingly, the three of them as the porters.

Mr George uses an extended text, so my recollection is complete now, and breaks out of his three acts on the first line of Banquo's "dost thou now" speech.

Banquo, Leslie Bayman is his best performance for a long time, resonant & keen the beginning again after the interval. Like The Assassins' man I found in all off-pacing and, considering the very specific sense of place, rather silly that in with any interpretation of Shakespeare there are places.

George paints up Lady Macbeth's later "I have given suck" by introducing a black shrouded cradle with her entrance and he rounds the song at the English court with the irony of long's end to emphasize the distinction between the severity of rigid law and the amorality of usurpation.

But in the end, of course, success or failure depends on Macbeth and his lady

Edwina Hodgeman, always headed for her role, is an excellent actor as her natural colour's world properly recognised. But in a slight case and, all right there were eight men in 16th century Scotland or Tantivy at whatever, he did not seem to me to acquire the grandeur that makes him at the end a truly tragic figure, one who respects pity though not sympathy.

Also, unusually or not, the production seemed to concentrate on action (with a series of the comic sequences that are rapidly becoming an SATC hallmark) and to sacrifice the poetry.

The general is there, the tyrant is there. The poet is missing.

Surprisingly, I was disappointed with Douglas Grey's Lady Macbeth. Her deepwalking and voice had matured. But its impact was lessened because she had earlier failed to connect the many strokes that trigger the tragedy. At the start she seemed almost gushing.

Since that is Australia's professional theatre at more than one venue, it should be noted that Barry J. Macduff is a strong shift of role from Pauline Butler in *Jane Eyre* (see even for a State repertory company) and Barbara West's Lady Macbeth was solid performance. But this was a production and an interpretation that demanded to be taken as a whole. It was a memorable one. Blotter for the wrong reasons.



Douglas Grey (Lady Macbeth) and Edwin Hodgeman (Macbeth) in the SATC's *Macbeth*.



## Competent but not exciting DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

RAYMOND STANLEY

*Desire Under the Elms* by Eugene O'Neill  
Melbourne Theatre Company, Athenaeum  
Theatre, Melbourne. Opened 7 November  
1977.

Director, Ray Lewis; designer, Tony  
Tripp; actress, Sally Cahill.  
Suzanne Cobet, Peter Quinn, Peter Caleo,  
David Dawson, Dena Cobet, Gary Down,  
Abbie Purnell, Barry Buddin, Ephraim  
Cobet, Tony McDearmon, musicians, Roy  
Baldwin, Turner, Anthony Hawkins,  
Robert Hewitt and members of the  
company: a young girl, Sally Cahill as old  
woman, Maura Glenn, a Sheriff, Roy  
Baldwin, Debraine, Anthony Hawkins,  
Robert Hewitt.

Although Eugene O'Neill is probably America's greatest playwright, *Desire Under the Elms* — what ruined today — is far from being his best play. It seems strange, therefore, that the Melbourne Theatre Company, which hitherto has staged only one of his plays (*A Touch of the Poet*) — although it did present the Old Town's *Moss for the Madgeponess* and SATC's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* — should select *Desire Under the Elms* now.

The only justification for mounting a production of this play perhaps would be to serve as a vehicle for a major talent in portraying the 36-year-old Ephraim or Abbie. This obviously is off the beaten track with the present production, or, in any case, the M.T.C. does not believe in a star system and selects the plays first, instead of contracting certain artists and then finding situations for them (perhaps one reason it might try this out and only be surprised at the result).

*Desire Under the Elms* (first staged in

America in 1924 with Walter Huston as Ephraim) is surely perfunctory. To my knowledge, London has seen only two productions: a club theatre presentation in 1931, which did much to launch Flora Robson on her illustrious career, and Eric Portman as Elmer, and in 1940 when Beulah Leverette was Abbie and she was replaced by Stephen Murray (later replaced by Griffith Jones).

Seeing the play today it is not difficult to realise why there appear to have been no few productions.

In 1850 the Sephardic Ephraim, a practicing farmer whose three sons live in fear of him — Jerome and Peter by his first marriage, Eliza by his second — takes a third wife, the plump 22 year old Abbie.

The two older brothers, obviously not endowed with intelligence, go off to the California gold fields, funded by Eliza who has discovered their father's hidden money box. Asserting the box had been his mother's, Eliza believes it should now be hers and so prevents Abbie. If not living,



Sally Cahill (Abbie) and Ephraim Cobet in the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *Desire Under the Elms*.

however, before the two become lovers and a child is born which Ephrem believes to be his. Tainted by the still more, Ebba is convinced Arbie has seduced her and, when he threatens to leave, in panic lets the newborn die suffocating.

O'Neill claimed the play had come to him in a dream, although there are several similarities to a play written five years before, *The Moon*. Psychiatrists have read into it numerous auto-biography.

Fifty-three years ago *Desire Under the Elms* was considered shocking and had charges of obscenity brought against it, the charges were dropped but, for many years it had the reputation of being an obscene play. Today it is claimed to teach, appear educational and perhaps a little propagandist. It would probably now make better viewing adapted to the film or TV medium rather than the stage.

A pity perhaps that director Ray Lawler did not do as he did with the recent production of Shaw's *Pygmalion* and partly worked from the script O'Neill wrote for a silent film version (of the script exists) which was never made and is said to have differed considerably from the play, with Arbie as a Hungarian emigrant (in the 1934 film Sophia Loren was an Italian emigrant). But it followed the original play.

Possibly the only way of making *Desire Under the Elms* effective today is to play it all straight — particularly with Ephrem — and not be frightened of indecencies that one would require actors who really know what they are about.

In the early scenes Peter Currie and David Deynor as the older brothers seem to have the right idea and were fine, but Gary Dawn as Ebba, Terry McDermott as Ephrem and Betty Bobbin as Arbie — or was it director Lawler? — seemed scared to go all out, so what could have been an exciting evening merely turned out to be only-so-so.

The three leads seemed strained and uncomfortable in their roles. Although not actually young bad performances — they always attained a competent level — they transmission was absent.

There were none of the "spark" which could perhaps have turned it into a dramatic occasion.

McDermott in particular seemed uncomfortable and frequently appeared to be talking through his nose, and lost most of the poetry in the part. Many of the subtleties of Arbie faded Bobbin and one is surprised Sandy Gore — for whom the role would seem more suited than some she has acted recently — was not cast. Added to all this, following O'Neill's simple folksy dialect, it was sometimes difficult to follow the words.

Tony Tripp's setting of a two spaced house, with the rooms open to the audience (acting on O'Neill's original directions, it was quite an innovation in the original production), is quite serviceable, even though it does fit awkwardly on the Australian stage. But one would have liked to have seen some time soon somewhere round.



Betty Bobbin (Arbie), Peter Currie and David Deynor (Ebba) in *Desire Under the Elms*, a production of Desires Under the Elms.



## A pretty lack-lustre night

### INNER VOICES

DON BATCHELOR

*Inner Voices* by Louis Neiva. La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, Qld. Opened 21 October 1977. Directed by David Bell.

The night I was supposed to be reviewing *Inner Voices* was spent instead in the city which-had-a-Wonderful-background, you might say, for a play about the incarceration of Jews in 1941. Our chairs, however, were somewhat different. We sat entirely alone, deprived of the sound of any human voice save his own. I was one of more than four hundred people representing a range of opinions about antisemitism among who found themselves suddenly seated by a common predicament.

I vacillated and shuddered as if we were to land before her even the minister, we were sustained by a rare sense of togetherness that transcended anger into a sort of elation. Our experience was the very antithesis of the hell of separateness actually suffered by Jews in the play.

Still, a moment was looked forward to the play with special interest. I had read Ross Camphagen's comparison with Calderon's *La Falsa Encarna* (which I do not know) and Hasidic *Kasper*, and was prepared for (disastrous) similarities. In the end there was growing irritation as the evening progressed partly because of the false expectations, partly with the play for not adequately symbolizing its disparate elements, partly with the producers for being so banal, and largely with the ease for making much of the script misappropriations.

In the matter of false expectations, the truth is, of course, my own. By a play that is pedagogic on anything but its own merits I acknowledge the error by way of a warning to those who might otherwise wonder by the end of Act II, how so simple yet effective a piece of narrative theatre could ever be the subject to comparison with Hasidic *Kasper*.

What happens in *Inner Voices* is that the whole first half is a little diffused that expresses that, in the second part, there is a bonfire of events and an explosion of the issue. Not only does the narrative element go into top gear, but the style and bearing of the play is of altogether a new and more philosophical order.

The demands of the second half while not stringent, are not sufficiently prepared for. Once you adjust to the change this is by far the richer and more interesting part. It is a dramatic illustration of the way our minds are invaded by voices from outside which are then transformed and take up residence as inner voices.

Just as I was fully captive to clearly false references fed to him by his "interlocutors", and misleading influences of situations like Prussia, Ah, so too am I, at some, aware of received experience. Furthermore, the claim of his, and half-truths upon profound confusion. Even if we ignore the outer voices, as I am doing by cutting out the tongue of his "inner", the inner voices do just cause their character. When he cries in his agony "I want to understand!" he is beginning to realize that the voices inside are not "my voices" — they cannot be categorized or dismissed. All we can do, as he accepts at the end, is listen.

A feature of the play which I found difficult to integrate was a sort of contemporary Australian aura which had something to do with the sexual words, and something to do with the rhythms of the people. This effect was compounded by the performers who related to the show in the degree that it became a statement of intent.

The Australian cast of the characters and of the actors does not sit easily at the alien and quasi-imperial atmosphere surrounding the theme of Imperial Russia. It puts the (founding of) Imperial army to bay, and makes no contribution to the more universal reflections in the second act. It will also be an aspect of the test which non-Australian productions will find elusive. Is an otherwise international play the same a pity?

What does work very well are the flashes of high theatricality — from being captured into learning Moisheh's name, the self-carrousel, the great figure, the scene with Betty Face. They were handled well at the production. It fell down, however, by being overwhelmingly gory in excess. What failed to be seen of humour in the second scene, for example, were not explored, and there was little space in the second catastrophic sequence. Hardly a laugh was raised all night, which made it all too heavy.

The performances did not help. They were too monochromatic. Gary Cook played Ira at a level of exaggerated intensity that was finally exhausting to watch. Peter Whistley's Moisheh looked wonderfully wild and coarse, but was physically

invited to a few flapping gestures and so visually cleaned up to be often unconvincing.

An Baby Face, Kay Perry gave a welcome injection of vivacity and colour in a portrayal that ranged between sardonic and benevolent appreciation. Her Prussia Ah, closed out like a tart and flavoursome a not bad French accent, was over-blown. The rest of the main government support without managing to make much of their parts. It must be admitted that with no more than twenty people in the house, it would be no easy matter to sparkle.

Well with one thing and another it was a pretty lacklustre night. At the time I was inclined to dismiss the whole thing. On cooler reflection I can see that the play, though flawed in a considerable achievement with abundant theatrical appeal, a startling story line, and interesting reflections on values or the way words which have the power to set us free, can also hold us in tatters that we can never escape.

## Butley (unfortunately) strikes again

### OTHERWISE ENGAGED

RICHARD TROTHERINGHAM

*Otherwise Engaged* by Simon Gray. Queensland Theatre Company, SG10, Brisbane, Brisbane, Qld. Opened 26 October 1977.

Director, Alan Edwards; designer, Peter Cook; Setts, Henrik, John Krammell, Dave, Peter Keene, Stephen Hock, David Channing, Jeff Golding, Les Assmann, David Souter, Pat Hodges, Wood, Russell Norman, Beth, Kate Wilson.

Only great and devout company has enabled me to avoid ever having to be stuck in a theatre with Simon Gray's *Butley* — a play which University English departments delight in reading and studying in order to prove that greater self indulgence hath no raise than this. I did, I must confess, succumb to the film (itself was half of a double bill) and for about ten minutes I kept engrossed in it. After that it was like being locked in a room for 2½ hours with the same person and having English tutor I can imagine. So devastating that Simon Head in *Otherwise Engaged* was

Beth Bailey revealed was not an encouraging way to begin an evening's entertainment.

Beth Bailey is a sort of environmental character, a man who talks in coded emotion rather than in豪言壮语, and who at the end of the play drives into some kind of self awareness. He has one verbal tick which he indulges in and we are reminded by the will — the deliberate misunderstanding.

Joyce: Beth, what's name?

Beth: Ted?

Beth: Ted is Ted's name?

Joyce: The one you call Ted is the one I call Ray. He calls himself Ray now.

Beth: How sweet.

What almost gives Bailey is the fact that the other major characters are more aware and self-aware than Bailey is. His wife Anne (or partially) refuses to play the maternal game, and is forced to find a means to escape from this sick world of slick and empty verbiage. Joyce, his boyfriend, also drops out of Bailey's life, recognising that this way ends up in living, sexual, and trivial though undoubtedly it is, death; at least goes out a suggestion that it was possible to find one's way out of the labyrinth of language into some kind of sanity and human reality.

Seasons Bleach is otherwise Engaged has both of Bailey's lamentable defects. (The truth concealing verbiage and the one-joked-and-told more). Only the job (book publisher rather than English teacher) has been changed tactfully to cover us so that he comes in the corpus. The plot is similar, except that in this new script the season of escape have closed up. Hesky starts and finishes by playing Wagner to himself, and offers not one word to suggest that any self-knowledge has been achieved (ah, but that's English understanding for you). The same role (asdy) but that's how we are made to see her! This is a simple problem but has returned from disconnected into connection. The other characters are equally uninteresting to me, with dreariness and snobbery being two of the results.

The script in short strikes me as one of the most obvious pieces of crap I've come across. The brother Stephen and the bridge-Dave have no star lines that are little better than cliché, and the same where Stephen tells Semeon (Semeon's wife's affair with another man would be rejected by any editor at Mills and Boon).

The dramatic conclusion is an endless series of dialogues leading to that most hackneyed resolution in modern English drama — the hour in which everything goes wrong, if not only a bit but poorly. The children were born in root, and smoldering clothes.

It's a technique that's both manipulative and debasing, urging us to sympathise with a stage character for whom we have been urging a quick and decent death. Plot developments are telegraphed like a bad punch line: the scene where the husband and wife talk actually wouldn't have been bad if we hadn't guessed about our hero

previously that she was pregnant. Add to this sub-Blaikley Black jokes about keeping one's end up, flaring during an interview, and sucking on the prefrontal breasts of the bitch lady, and we finish up with a decadent mess which isn't even well written.

The QTC production does little to help. It is a classic example of Australian actors trying to imitate the damaged witty cadence of the French and English w/ a style closer to porridge than to Jerry Lewis.

David Cuthbertson, a very fine actor who convincingly portrays Mr Pagan in *The Season at Saragossa*, I forgot to mention last year, founders desperately as the brother Stephen. Peter Kwong gives us his usual Hollywood coolness, and the other minor characters were singularly dreadful, although in Pat Bailey's case I suspect it's the way the role of the look and rock body is written (with obligatory faced turnips) that makes it impossible for anyone to come out of it with distinction.

John Krasenoff as Semeon succeeded splendidly in achieving a lightness of

tone, but fell into the consequent trap of offering us an A to B emotional range, only in the key encounter with his wife Beth (who, there seems, completely of unknown name Wilson did her best with Beth but again Garry's writing of the female roles is curbed down).

Most frightening, perhaps, is that the QTC has dumbedown the cast over-large and not over-emphatic audience, you thinking that this rubbish is at least enjoyable. (One end up joke and the last traps were amongst the best of the night). As an English actor (other than Scott) and to me recently, "In our English department they actually believe that their little world is some kind of microcosm of the entire system?"

The same seems to be true of devotees of *Bailey*, *Otherwise Engaged*, and the current QTC offerings. And in Queensland where authority is undoubtedly the greatest predictor our society has, how else could you describe *Otherwise Engaged* but as the QTC blurb does: "A very bumpy day at the nation system?"



Pat Bailey (Davies) and John Krasenoff (Semeon) in the QTC's *Otherwise Engaged*.

**GUIDE****TUTORIA**

**ARENA CHILDREN'S THEATRE** (right side)  
Locally primary and secondary schools with  
The Snowman: The Travelling Pantomime  
by Michael Morpurgo and Murray, the Root of All  
Evil (10 Dec 15; Workshops 11 am to noon 1  
to 4 pm; 19 to 20 Dec)

**AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING ARTS** (left side)  
The Song for Santa Christmas Extravaganza  
Streetworks by Bob Day, Carol Power and  
Richard Murphy. Music by Maxineion (music  
by) (10 Dec)

**COMEDY THEATRE** (mid-left)  
Side by Side by Sondheim with Jim Parsons  
and Neil Patrick (costumes)

**THE HOOPLA FOUNDATION**

Playhouse Theatre (mid-left)  
Brisbane Theatre production of *The Police*  
by Coleen Gray (10 to 12 Dec)  
Monks' Last Jiffy After by Heathcote  
Williams. Featuring Bruce Myles. Directed by  
Graeme Blundell (costumes, them., pri. set,  
11 pm, 12 to 13 Dec)

**LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT**  
(top left)  
Back to Berlin Street with Evelyn Krupp (costumes)

**LA MAMA** (mid-right)  
People Productions. *Translators* by Roger  
Purcell, directed by Michael Rubenstein (10 to  
11 pm, 1 to 10 Dec)  
*Quorum Productions*: *Engaged*, a "BC" rated  
paper show directed by Bert Cooper (10 to  
11 pm, 1 to 10 Dec)

**MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY**  
(top right)  
*Arthrogram*  
*Once Under the Allee* by Eugene O'Neill  
Directed by Ray Lawler. Directed by Tony  
Trapp (10 to 12 Dec)  
*King Among the Men* by Jerry Arnoff  
adapted by Christopher Fry. Directed by John  
Sumner, designer, Alan Franks (from 13 Dec)  
Russell Street.  
*Cop Out* by Cliff Green. Directed by Paul  
Kerr, designed by Steve Price (costumes)

**PILLIGUL PLUPPET THEATRE** (mid-right)  
A Long Day's Journey into the Butterfly Song (11  
Dec)

**PLAYHOUSE THEATRE** (mid-right)  
**MARIONETTE THEATRE OF**  
AUSTRALIA.  
Richard Bradshaw and the Shadow Puppets, a  
one man show (from 7 Dec)

**PRINCESS THEATRE** (mid-right)  
M&M Projects and Co. *Box with Boxes*  
Oliver, Jane Brookfield, Thelma Edwards and  
David Henneman. Directed by Sean  
Cawley. Musical director, Terry Vaughan  
(costumes)

**VICTORIA STATE OPERA** (mid-right)

*Paper & Pictures & Plays* or *The Paper Cover*  
of *Knowledge Papers*, by Peter Newbery (costume  
on schools tour). Melbourne metropolitan  
area and Victorian country centres (12  
Dec)

**WINDSOR REGIS THEATRE**  
RESTAURANT

*Braveheart*. Robin Maxwell written by Chilcott  
and Mann, with Robert Isaac, Alison Archer,  
Max Challenor, Colleen Moore and John Cowan  
(costumes)

**TWELFTH NIGHT** (mid-right)

Somewhere I Abide by Jason McDonald  
David Voss and Robert Gethin. Director, John  
Whalley, designer Jennifer Carrollton (10 to  
Dec)  
*Phantomovore* by Paul Cullings (10 to 12 Dec)

a.c.t.

**CANBERRA PLAYHOUSE** (mid-right)  
Joseph and the Night Watcher (Urgy Singers) (1  
Dec)

**COOGEE THEATRE** The Bell & the Bagdad musical  
(10, 11-12 Dec). *Patrick's Warmer* (10-12  
Dec)

**CANBERRA THEATRE** (mid-right)

*Gardens Open* (10 to 12 Dec)  
*Stephen and Esmeralda* (check) 1 and 2 Dec  
Conductor: David Hunter. Producer: John  
Tucker, designer, Mark Major  
*Old Fashioned Farcey Show* (17 Dec)

**HIBISCUS THEATRE RESTAURANT**  
(mid-right)

*Order of a Jukebox* by Ross Parer and John  
McKellar. Directed by Jason Hutchins with  
Robert Cowan, Greg Williams and Deborah  
Gordon (costumes) (1)

**LAKESIDE HOTEL THEATRE**  
RESTAURANT (mid-right)

*We're Just Good Friends* musical drama/short  
sketch by Jason Hutchins, starring Mary  
ann, Michael Williams and Fred Jones (costumes)

**THEATRE THREE** (mid-right)  
Comedy by Alexander Dumas. Directed by Ross  
McGregor (14-17 Dec)

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA****O THEATRE** (mid-right)

*After Ever* adapted by Barry Quarrie. Directed by  
Jane Marshall (Wed — Sat, 7-11 Dec)

**LITTLE THEATRE**

*Global Therapy*. For or Not after by Ken Ross  
and *There Were Giants in Those Days* by Steven  
J. Speer (10 to 12 Dec).  
*Tragedy Game* (check) (costumes and directed  
by David Allen (1-9 Dec)

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE**  
COMPANY (mid-right)

*Playhouse & Happy and Wholy* (check) by  
John O'Dowd. Directed by Ross Ross,  
designed by John Corcoran (10-11 Dec)

## TANTRUM

THEATRE ROYAL (Stratford)  
Lyric Theatre. *After* was by J.M. Barrie.  
C/O 9am - 12 Dec.  
African Dance Company (11, 12 Dec).

## LASMANIAN PUPPET THEATRE

C/O 9am  
Woman's Little Music Show by Peter Wilson  
Directed by Nigel Triffitt (2, 12 Dec).

## WESTERN MUSICALS

### CITY THEATRE RESTAURANT (129 1993)

The Christmas Show with Max, Kyle, Alan Dale and Peter Dean (11 Dec) - 5 sets.

HOLLY IN THE WALL (129 1993)  
*Original* directed by Edgar Masliah (from 2 Dec and continuing).

PLAYHOUSE (129 1993)  
*Gold* directed by Steven Green and *Snowdog*  
Directed by Aaron Minns with Joost Syringa (12 Dec 1993).

## WITH SIDE BY SIDE

### ACTORS COMPANY (129 1993)

No More Lones by Harold Pinter, directed by  
Rodney Shulman. With Andrew Gatt, Michaela  
Hooper, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by  
Peter Tinker, directed by Steve Thompson, (from  
26 Dec).

### ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH

WALES (129 1993)  
The Dark Household And Puppet Workshop  
Comprising six primary schools from Sydney metropolitan areas (to 16 Dec). *Mothers Who  
Dance* (featuring an pantomime school show),  
*Moses*, New England north coast characters  
to 16 Dec. *Alice McHale's Folk Songs and  
Guitar* (featuring real New South Wales folk 24  
Dec, Sunday and ninth matinée 25 Dec).

### AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (129 1993)

Dodger by Richard Telford with Jess Culpin  
and Ray Anderson (featuring primary schools,  
Wollongong, south coast, Riverina districts of  
NSW in association with Arts Council of  
NSW) to 16 Dec. *I.D.A.* (Saturdays, 12.45pm to  
1.30pm, in end of year).  
*Summertime Rock Opera*, for age group 12  
to 20 (play at S.I.D.A., from 9 Dec).

### BALMAIN THEATRE (129 1993)

Let Me Forget Today, selected lyrics by Eric  
Wilson (12 original production by Phil Gossen  
etc, Australian production by Peter Hasty  
(continuing).

### ENGIMBLE (129 1993)

The Princess of Savoy Shows by Ned Sherrin,  
directed by Roger Cordiner, with Brian Young  
(from 1 Dec).

## CHINESE (127 1993)

In Devil's Whistle by Oscar Wilde, directed  
and designed by Peter Hickey (to 10 Dec).  
Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott directed  
and adapted by Margaret Russell (from 17  
Dec).

## HER MAJESTY'S (121 1991)

A China Town original production conceived,  
choreographed and directed by Michael  
Roversi and choreographed Ruth Aron, music by  
Kenny Klampayn and Naphisa Dajani, made by  
Marion Marshall, lyrics by Edward Kitchin,  
choreography and direction revisited for  
Australia by Baayork Lee and Billie Hunter  
Cost of 20 (to 17 Dec).

## KILLARNEY COFFEE THEATRE

1993 (1992)  
The Wizard of Oz Musical Play (Revised),  
directed and designed by John Horner (continuing to  
New Year's Day).

## MARIAN STREET (1993-1994)

A Festa Film, Happened on the Way to the  
Festa, music and lyrics by Stephen Josephson,  
host by Bert Mendelsohn and Lucy Gutteridge,  
directed by Adrian Dennis. With Johnny  
Lockwood (as Christmas).

## MARIONETTE THEATRE OF AUSTRALIA (121 1991)

Hi Lounge and Hi Lounge, a children's musical  
show by Norman Hetherington loosely based on  
the traditional Macmillan play (including full  
Sydney Opera House, 14 and 17 Jan).

## MILCAT HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (129 1993)

Let It Go Power or Party in Pantomime,  
written and directed by Michael Budd (continuing).

## MILCAT HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (129 1993)

The Glass Dove Show produced by William  
Cox (continuing).

## NEW BONAPARTES THEATRE RESTAURANT (127 2159 or 127 2999)

Lady Jane (129 1993), choreographed and  
directed by Maggie Martin (continuing).

## NEW THEATRE (119 1993)

Curse of Kings by Eric Mottram, directed by Jack  
Loyd, designed by Rodolph Shaw (to mid  
December).

The Master of Pit Mad, a original surreal  
inspired by Moss Hart and John Lipson (from  
mid December).

## NOMAD (129 1993)

Upstart, The Club by David Williamson,  
directed by John Bell, designed by Tom Bassett  
Music: Jeff Astley. Drew Forsyth, Rob  
Graham, Ben Headland, Paul Kelly, Barry  
Lund (to 8 Dec).

Rockabilly by Tim Goding, directed by  
Richard Wherrett, designed by Anna Thompson  
With Kim McQuade, Vicki Ward, Robe  
Ramsay, Tony Upton, Jason (from 1 Dec).  
Dumbstruck (129, to 20 Dec), original written  
by Ian Hunter, with John Gedra, Dorothy  
Tanner, directed by Lynne Alia (from 1  
Dec).

Island in Sydney Harbour, yet to be chosen  
Treasure Island, freely adapted by Ken Hurley  
From Robert Louis Stevenson, directed by Ken  
Hurley, designed by Lucy Kitchin. Costumes  
Caroline Collier, John O'Meara (to 24 Dec).

## NO. 40 THEATRE RESTAURANT, 39 Bourke St (129 1993)

4 Captain's Holiday Party by Pat Curley  
directed and produced by Pat Curley, choreo-  
graphy by Keith Little, set by Greg Anderson,  
costumes by Ray Wilson (to New Year's).

## OLD DOT (129 1993)

Opera Theatre Opera House The Lower  
Depth, by Marion Clark, directed by Leon  
Golds, designed by Helen Sherrin. With John  
Bell, Russell Potts, Boos Stoen, Ben Gately,  
Jonah Cleary, Lucy Lucas, Kim McQuade,  
John Fawcett (to 20 Dec).

The Tempest by William Shakespeare, directed  
by Ted Craig, designed by Wayne Neale and  
Hugh Calvert. With Michael Caine, Jon Evans,  
Roy Dupuis, James Clinton, Ralph Cosgrove,  
Colin de Planchi, Russell Keast (from 1 Dec).  
Picnic, *Glorious, Glorious or Small Space* by Ian  
Stevens and Robert Trevor Long,  
designed by Tony Tapp, directed by Rodney  
Frater. With Holly Little, Melinda Pivacova,  
John Everett, Pauline Hess Thompson (to  
5 Feb).

## ONE AND ONLY (1993-1994) PALACE THEATRE RESTAURANT, Swan Street (129 1993)

The Golden Shoes, directed and written by Gary  
Down and Jon Polydore, directed and staged  
by Jon Polydore (continuing to New Year's  
Day).

## PLAZA THEATRE Board Junction (129 1993)

Show Me Love Supply by Chris Bush, Lucy  
directed by Peter Williams (to 16 Dec).

Q THEATRE, Pitt St (127 12 2721) The  
Master of Moon Matrix or The Queen's  
Curse, adapted from original material by Max  
Elford, directed by Ken MacIntosh, designed by  
Ariane Dyrck (to 21 Dec).

## ST JAMES PLAYHOUSE (121 1993)

Underworld, a children's pantomime directed and  
produced by Peter Williams (from 2 Jan).

## SYNDYKE CENTRE (129 1993)

London, The Great Adventure, a full length  
musical comedy adventure show created and  
directed by Philip Adams with 125  
participants (from 2 Jan).

London, London, by Paul Turner, directed by  
Giselle Brown (from 4 Jan).

## SPAGHETTI THEATRE RESTAURANT Kensington (129 1993)

The Gold Rush, directed and designed by  
Glynis Roberts (to Christmas).

## SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE (129 1993)

Reception Hill, The Sydney Experience, an  
adventure adventure devised by Mike Shelly  
(continuing).

## THEATRE ROYAL (121 1991)

The 10 and 11 The Dot, by Debrah  
Gillies, O'Meara, musical direction, Michael  
Lyons, choreography, Julian Flanagan, design,  
Tara Polley. With John Duthie, Caroline  
Collier, John O'Meara (to 24 Dec).

## WHITE HORSE HOTEL, Petersham (121 1993)

4 Justice Stories, by Rick Mayes, Dominic  
Ratty, Peter Stevens and Michael Parfrey,  
directed by Ian Taylor, designed by Peter  
Fitter and Susan Fowley (to Christmas).

Playscript.

JACK



Jim McNeil

# JACK



The play is set inside various NSW gaols — cell A, Parramatta, the "Gin" section at Long Bay is ready at the maximum security gaol at Goulburn.

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## ACT TWO

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The OBS, or the psychiatric observation service at Long Bay Gaol. It is a prison within a prison where patients considered to be mentally disturbed are treated like pigs. Also men of unassessed fitness are kept there while awaiting their court appearances, presuming they are no legal charges. The doctors make reports upon their mental condition and these reports are used in the courts at their trials. Unqualified warders are suspended to provide tranquillising pigs — to force them into any new arrival — and any recalcitrant or irredentist to The Barron. But men are the victims not only of their mental troubles but also of a system that approves nothing but a life of confinement without hope.

In the OBS the patients are kept in cells by night and a concrete yard by day. In the yard are cages, in the cages men who are considered not ready to walk the yard. It is not much like a zoo. On the concrete floor they are like dogs like dogs around a

poisoned waterhole. Their bones shifted with drugs, with needles with thorns up and down, waiting perhaps to see a doctor or some religious chaplain, or the next tranquilised approach from a warden, simply for the time to be looked again in their cells where the lights are always on and darkness becomes a prison to be escaped for but never granted. Men are strapped naked across their cells and ordered to sit on sharp gypsum from which the same cords have been removed. They are locked in with a bad rubber padlock and a loud speaker system that blares insatiable music through the windows of just or not just when you get there it won't make you long.

The OBS Service Long Bay Gaol  
The Wardens and all the cover stage

Warden: Even the King and thou art my vas-

the Gin day — you never know — you may be arrested on a capital D charge, in which case you'll be committed to my care while the doctors prepare a report upon your mental condition. I'll be here to look after you like a mother — with those [holding up a bottle of pills] and with this [holding up a bottle of booze].

Of course I have others who come to see me. Sometimes, you know, there are well-groomed prostitutes who can't handle the few miserable parts they've been relegated to. They crack up, they believe in the unwilling rats they are — and they are therefore loaded into one of our comfortable wagons and sent here for observation. The doctors are very often fooled by their looks and their names [smirking]. But not me. I've never failed — I can't lie, because I know that all patients are rats that ought to be trapped. All of them! All of them! Trapped like rats! [over his head] — and speaking of rats,

Jack: comes which are traps. What's overall and hard off? Slapping hands is dead.

Wander: Hello, hello both.

Jack: Hello.

Wander: Don't answer back. Where have you come from?

Jack: From Parliament.

Wander: Parliament in who?

Jack: Parliament Sir.

Wander: Sir! That's right. Sir! Why are you here?

Jack: They just invited me — Sir.

Wander: Obviously take those (he takes pen from the Wander).

Jack: (Hesitatingly). What are they?

Wander: You don't know what they are?

Jack: No.

Wander: Oh, well don't be too disengaged. You're really a new conversant. You got another chance to write a poem — can you tell me what this is? (he snags the pen from Jack).

Jack: It's a button Sir.

Wander: Gag! Wrong! You don't want the pen to write my Graham. No — this is not a button at all. It's actually a gold coin. I play a lot of gold. It is not a fact, that I'm the only man in Sydney able to throw one hand with one stroke — am you able to believe that? Would you prefer a demonstration? I would you rather try to question these without questions?

Jack: easily eaten and available to pull.

Wander: Fine. Open your mouth again. (he peers into Jack's mouth). — I Mourn  
My young design — good, all gone  
Bump off! Oh! but of course you can't, can you? Hold on out. Here we are. (He snatches the handkerchief from Jack). Now stop — neatly snarled.

Jack: Mourn?

Wander: Get out!

Jack: No.

Wander: No!

Jack: I'm all right.

Wander: I said stop — stop.

Jack: I can't. I won't. No. You continue to be used. I'm not used.

Wander: You're a prisoner.

Jack: So.

Wander: So you'll be what you're told.

Jack: No. No more. No.

The Wander slowly walks Jack, who backs away from the threat of the snapping fingers.

Jack: You've got no rights.

The Wander stops as though uninvited.

Wander: No right. (He points to his cap — to his hands — to his uniform — to his boots) What do you think this is? And this? And this? And these? Hey! They're BRIGHT! They have to be! And where do you think you are? Prison! You're a prisoner and you're wrong! I AM the Right! The only Right! — Stop! Stop! Jack slowly steps off the gravel. The Wander never has shown a prisoner.

Wander: Get out there! (Jack gets onto the gravel, holding up his pants by them. Now again a look you mad bastard — Most! That way! Marry! (He snags Jack's backpack with the hands driving him off the stage as the lights go down.)

Play lights go up again and The Wander holds on out.

Wander: Well, you see what I mean, that was one of them. A bit of a madman, a dangerous madman. My job is to protect you from things like that. And I do. I look around where you never need (you) ever or now protect 'em' and when happens? For all you what happens — the bloody doctors and never people of today let 'em out! They — let — down — out! They sit! They sit — out — out — and what happens? They rob you again, they come back again and I have to start all over again, putting numbers on 'em' old going through the whole bloody process of teaching the humans their place again — no, that I really need, you get used to it after a while. Like anything else. You get good at it really, if you stay the rules and keep up with — good morning Doctor.

The Doctor comes out, sits at a table, and dug in the papers, taking papers from his bag and pinning through strips.

Doctor: There is a reception.

Wander: There you looked him in.

Doctor: I'll take him now.

The Wander picks up his coat, goes off to get Jack. The Doctor watches The Wander go inside.

# JACK



Doctor: He's annoyed. They're always annoyed when I come to see a prisoner. They can't see any point to it. (Wander can't find the time, can you?) (He picks up papers, walking about, like the cat, for instance).

Jack: whatever his name is — according to this report, he threatened to do re his cell-mate. And what did I suppose to do about that? Why did he want to kill? Will he tell me if I ask him? And if he does tell it be the truth? And if it is the truth, will it help me to help out? Who knows? (Along) But it's a living. it's a living for us all — well, nearly all. Never mind. My own concern is the application of the healing art to mental disease — that and nothing more. But a doctor's task in this particular situation — I could do this one, perhaps, but then what? He will be returned to the place from whence he came, as they say, and the terrible whatever is still to come again. It's a little like treating a man who's fallen from a road and then throwing him all again.

Jack comes on, shouting forward to The Wander.

Wander: Stand there.

Doctor: You pass it down. That will be all, thank you, officer.

Jack goes down. The Wander comes off roughly.

Wander: Now then, Jack, it's all about seems to be the trouble.

Jack: I've got nothing to say.

Doctor: No more complaints.

Jack: No complaints, sir.

Doctor: Ah, but according to this report we seem to have been treated with a certain — to like you didn't understand it to help.

Jack: (not understanding).

Doctor: If I have you facts if you talk so on like that. One of my personal considerations is that I simply had being told to get fucked.

Jack: Who?

Doctor: I was at boarding school.

Jack: Oh.

Doctor: There. I've told you a secret. Now my turn. I want to help.

Jack: Can you and me home?

Doctor: You know I can't.

Jack: Well get fucked.

Doctor: Officer! (Motions to The Wander) march on! The prisoner is not prepared to co-operate at this stage. We shall try again in a week. Meanwhile, Doctor, try and three times daily. He has a delicate personality indeed. I should think it would at this stage to allow association with the others. Kingman is a case for now. I leave by day of course. Well I'll be off. (Pretend to scratch other) The Doctor leaves. The Wander motions Jack, going up. Jack stands and waits.

Wander: Sir, we're not going to be co-operative! (He pushes Jack backwards) We're going to be uncooperative and we (He beats Jack on the arm with his baton) — see well — never me! (he shows Jack a torn well open hand).

Jack: You bloody animal.

Wander: Animal! (He yells) But how can I be the animal? Who's going to be kept in a cage? You or me? Who's going to be caged with a prisoner and a hand of water — you or me, you fucking cat! — who?" (Another beat with his baton) And who's going right now to his basic cell, with his little rabbit prodded and the light that never goes off in me can watch the cat all the time (A laugh) — WHO? Who is the animal? You haven't even got a name any more, just fucking dog! (He pushes Jack to the floor, causing a flag obviously with his baton as the lights go down.)

Doctor: The sound of the flopping. Jack crying.

Light up.

Jack stands holding up his hands. (He turns to show out the window)

Jack (shouting) Where the fucking hell am I? Where the fucking hell are you? You're not having prisoners a good time vacation or what? You're at the pictures, or some fucking where... I change.

I change... I change how this can happen. How can you just go to the pictures and be a... bigger? How can you know that, if I help? How isn't you then what's happening to me? Canta... you're crazy... what's the Festival of fucking Light? (crying) — where are you? Me



We are down and begin to cry, when suddenly The door opens and The Doctor comes.

Doctor: Hello now! What have we got here? Why all the tears? There, now we have to be... um... come-come-come! just like you obviously. Nowhere to go!

Jack: I'm a doctor to you

Doctor: Oh - well, you know that. Doctors in numbers don't say at your age. Besides, here I am to see you and have a... that's not the sort of you I'm trying, are we? Have you taken your pills today?

Jack: No - no I haven't - and I'm not going to take 'em today or say they You won't need me but I'm needed - I'm not

Doctor: Oh, now however - we must take our medicine - didn't the officer give them to you?

Jack: Yeah - and I took me finger down and opened my eye up - and I'll keep on doing it and you can stop me - I'm not mad - not going to be treated as if I am - just that?

Doctor: Of course. But of course I have to decide that - that's my job, to make a report upon whether you're fit to be released - so let's talk, and my report can be done the sooner - however?

Pause

Jack: All right - we'll talk then.

Doctor: Good! Now this is sensible. Rational. We're doing splendidly (writing notebook and pen) Now, then, you name - Jack, didn't? And how old are you, Jack?

Jack: Thirty-four - today. They've already given me my birthday present.

Doctor: Your present?

Jack: Yeah - that's the surprise he brought! What are you gonna do about it?

Doctor: Well I'm a psychiatrist - you'll do best to pay down for next parole.

Jack: Yeah - I thought so. Ferguson.

Doctor: Now where were you born? Brothers and sisters?

Jack: Brisbane. You know.

Doctor: Uh-huh. And are you the oldest, or the youngest, person alive?

Jack: Youngest. No, they're dead.

Doctor: Oh I'm sorry. Where did you grow up?

Jack: We moved to Sydney when I was nine. I went to a Catholic school of St Mary's - a lot of us went to Catholic schools. Then all of a sudden my mom and dad were dead and I landed up in a home known as Montague's Barracks.

Giggled through the years to Lang Bay Gaol, Parramatta, the whole bloody process up to you. It's been gross. And you wouldn't understand a thing about it, so what's the use of talking? Tell that.

Doctor: I can see here to tell you anything. I'd like to ask you though, now that I see you have a long record as a criminal, what was your crime this time?

Jack: Car stealing. I got five years and I've done two-and-a-half of 'em.

Doctor: And how do you feel about your crime? Are you proud of it? Sorry? Do you feel guilty... or not?

Jack: I'm sorry... that I got caught. Doctor: I see. And what about any wife or children... any?

Jack: A wife. She's not much her. She doesn't love me. Used to love 'em though.

Doctor: Oh that's really too bad.

Jack: Yeah. Too bad.

Doctor: And how do you feel about the now? Do you like her still? Hate her? Or don't you like her at all? What's that you're thinking about that?

Jack: I don't know what to feel.

Doctor: Really?

Doctor: I think... oh, well I'm down to misery.

Jack: Heaven's?

Doctor: Well, I only meant... well, then, when actually... supposed to you as Parramatta I have a bone that you had some kind of difference with another chap why? Did you argue? Did you do something wrong to him? Did he do something wrong to you? What was it?

Jack: I had something! He killed it. Then he returned for the remains and I stoned 'em. I was gone for a while but it's alright now - LEFT MIL COO Pines.

Doctor: Yes, you but all in good time Parramatta - what was the "something" he killed?

Pause

Jack: I don't know... not now.

Doctor: Hardly to remember.

## JACK



Jack: I don't want to remember. And I won't remember. And not something else.

Doctor: Well, let me try to remind you. I have a hunch that your "something" was simply a plastic bag... of water... because?

Jack: It wasn't a bag... you know.

Doctor: No, but I want to know. That's why I'm here... to know what you thought you had. Do you still think, of it? Do you still think?

Jack: Still... determined to talk no more. The Doctor sat across from him, thinking... trying another tact.

Doctor: Look, Jack-boy, this doesn't mean me any more than it does you, but I've got a job to do here... and so here you... never took you to bring all this unpleasantness to a happy conclusion.

Jack: I forgot a bit too, at home, and I have children. I'm human too, you demand?

Jack: Oh you fucked well no! Do you think I've been all the Federal places? I've been... and seen what. I've seen and known what. I've known you're no worse people than you can treat me like a fucking schoolboy! Listen! There's nothing wrong with me! Okay, so I went to the fancy bar a while, but that's over now, it didn't work for me. It's over, I won't do it again, just said me back, and

I'll be all right, and you can live, and kids, big ol' truck off to safety, and your mother leave me alone. PLEASE!

Pause

Doctor: You may be right. We'll see. I think about our talk, and then we'll see GM choose her next best planing spot. Yes.

In fact, she will, you're probably right, but that's understandable to one circumstances. Believe it or not, I've become even more to Parramatta. What could pose attitude toward the other follow up?

Jack: He's my friend. It was my last. All I want to do is apologize to him. It's my mate. I'm alright now... please send me back.

The Doctor stands abruptly, closing his notebook.

Doctor: I find you to be quite obviously wise and most characterly wise operator (he walks in the door, pausing before passing out) We'll see.

He goes out the door. It turns that Bob is standing. Jack, not surprisingly. He turns, puts up his hands, hands shaking, goes... Turning to the window.

Jack: (Helpless & hopeless) Oh what's a different spot?

Jack walks slowly up and down, a picture of concern. The door rattles open and the winter comes in steadily.

Wander: So you managed it.

Jack: What?

Wander: That stupid speech you informed me you're all right. You're to go back where you came from... out of here.

Jack: Well thank Christ for that, (smiles).

Wander: Don't laugh yet... there's a fresh master of you calling me an animal. I didn't like that... I still don't like that. You understand that? You're just put yourself in GRAFTON.

Jack: I could get fucked - soon.

Wander: Oh, yes... but you'll change your mind when you get there. You know what's going to happen when you get there. Home?

Jack: Like I suppose... they'll give me a bag of fucking polythene and a kiss... go and get fucked you sonuvabitch. Do what you like, I fuck off and leave me alone... come for tonight... leave me alone. (he pleads) Listen, you said, of course I don't know what's gonna happen there or anywhere else... neither do you.

Wander: Oh, but I do. I used to be there... and I got condemned down here... (laughs)... Let me tell you that... you'll go there in handcuffs and a chain... and when you get to the gate you'll be asked what your name is and where you came from... if you get a search on the搜身... and the Chaffell will ask you again, and you'll answer again and you'll get another search on the search... then he'll ask you again and you'll be a stupid enough prick to answer again and there'll be another search on the search... "a then..." you know that's before you get in the block-bash... or when you'll be taken into the wing and y'fucking who's there? The Reception Committee... perhaps you've heard of them on the fass-

ball team (laugh) ... and they bring you off and kick the cart out of you hands ... and then every day you'll get it, they'll see you assault as often ... you broken' out the powers and order preparing in Boston. And that's someone You'd never dream'd by that idea and you're READY to go ... to just get ready to go ... I'll take to it.

Jack I'm ready to go  
lights down

lights up

The Doctor and The Warden stand across and begin to sing

OH! The System's working well,

The System's working well

We've got lots of prisoners

to look up to the cells

And all they do is lay in

we send them to this hell

Doctor I've got the rules (chuckles)

Warden And I've got the ... (chuckles)

4-5-6 THE SYSTEM'S WORKING WELL

I think you all have done!

Doctor Well I've done my best and worked so hard

to deserve this hell,

I've asked hundred questions

but he will not answer back

Warden And so have I. I've done my job,

my job is getting paid

I've flagged the bastard staged

but he always asks for more

Doctor His demands relentless

and keeps up his remorse,

we'll hand him to you guys

we'll keep him in his cell

Warden Well I'll penetrate the monitored walls,

and if he will not tell

Well I'll send him off to GRAFTON

and the System will work well!

They, once some more together)

lights down

lights up

A Gordon and Jack are thrown roughly through the door, Gordon swearing the usual prison groans

Warden Voice Get us there you fuckas with this!

The door slams and it belches Jack, the sarcasm on the floor for seconds. Then he picks himself up and slowly regards the surroundings. He stands. Begrime to walk about nervously.

Jack (the your son again) Gordon they nearly killed me ... they have killed me ... with dogs ... one of 'em' beats 'n' bounces a barrel of fat ... come ... I think we must have been dogs

ah well, he said a line ... no way out in this fucking one ... see bud ... with I had a gun ... I just lost 'em ... the bastards ... to watch ... (laughs or she laughs) ... see ... I haven't got a gun, haven't even got a hope left in the world much less any answer to the bastards ... and suddenly gives a bark

He falls silent and pauses silently about the cell. Review

The Angel of the stars, grande, his love (quiver) (chuckles). It is only the man whose reason is clouded by his sexual impulse who would undertake the impossible task for the sake of one of those hideous, narrow-minded — talk victims.

The place is silent for a few seconds and resumes

The music now comes in quietly ... The Bass and the Bassoon. He sits down on the edge of a stool

All well, there's gone ... what's it married? They've probably done a nice little favour probably. Poor old Tom, he's a traitor. I suppose ... probably doesn't know what's happened to a man ... never mind, there's nobody going to care me ... except these bastards ... I'll be dead ... 'see out of that bus' 'go on'

He places a pipe Where the one blow along the river's bank with whatever the ruby vintage dark and white the Angel with his darker draught draws up to the ... take that and the red shawl

He places his hand possessively

Yeah, that's gonna be last and fancy

We're almost passing

You know, it is easy ... no, not easy but it's easier than the next thing, easier than the ... tell all the way you drink, the lip you

## JACK



press, and in the sachet all things said in ... yeah ... remember this ... though art but what thou shall be — nothing ... thou shall not believe ... press ... 'no it's that I could be like this nothing' ... I could have been a screw — ha-ha-ha! 'Saw Why the looks' 'did I ever bother to read?' Jack goes with the self-picking his nose and examining the presents with cautious respect ... his hand on his pocket. He sits down and addresses the window

Jack (Fatty holler, I know ... they don't give you bloody blankets, tho', so what's a man to do?) Is Fatty, another ... (smells) ... smokes ... Dairy Devil or Fatty Richard now ... the old song, ah ... Remember that one, about the last who and ... like on the top and he won the lottery?

He coughs — says

Oh, I used to live in Dudley Plaza,

until I went to prison in Tall A.

but Fatty Devil or Fatty Richard now

(he pauses) (laughs to himself) Ah yeah ... the old ... Dairy Devil ... with it had a ... heurn me ... (laughs again)

My memory was infected ...  
my clothing was straight ...  
my old shirt had was (infected),  
I was often punished for it.  
I was often punished for it.  
I knocked around the world of them,

my only mates were tramps and bums, that Derry Devil or Fatty Richard now ... He chuckles and my dad's voice ... Ah the old songs ... can't beat 'em ... with old Dick had a left me a quad, though Bloody! That's what I thought he'd ... make a will ... five years at the Murphy house ... brought ... got a panel, but ... ah, well, it's the thought that counts, so they say. Well, let's see ... for a start, I can leave this to ... See ... the pinky up there ... after I drag one on it ... (laughs) ... he could wear it instead of his cap, won't be better, much more appropriate, in fact, for a card like him ... With certain people a change ... (laughs) ... ah, ah, the man being a hero all the bastards in my bloody absence when they have nothing ... play with me ... every other poor bastard ... yeah ... 'is what about me ... what about old Tim, who's a wonder, what's happening ... now, I suppose ... (pauses) ... Tim? ... to you I bequeath my collection ... one month on the board ... it's yours ... tell the Screw I said ... and also all we I said to get fucked ... thank you

(He stands up and walks away)

What else ... 'Nothin' I've bringin' on myself ... now ... musically speaking? ... that is ... neither the right word? Fuckified if I know ... 'dell you have a do, anyway ... who gives a f\*\*\*? I don't ... I do, but not about words. Fuckin' Mad night? 'T'isn't me' ... I'm leaving you all, the things we used to have ... it's all the things that we might've had but we've grown ... we ... not ... not ... and wouldn't that sound ya? Remember that ... know you still sing at the sessions, with the rest on the road and us ... snogged-up, that's how happy we were? Yeah ... well we never saw this lot again ... did we? No fear, fucked if we did

But here it is and it's not good going away from no one ... 'Our love is here to stay' (laughs briefly) ... never mind, get yourself some time, make yourself after ya ... it's too high up to eat grass, darling ... we do, go, wept, my black dog. Free ... just let your grow long — Jesus Christ.

(Matters and turns the piano to the band)

Well it's time. Name (faltering) their

He goes and takes a sheet ... tearing it into strips ... he makes the strips into a kind of loop ... He measures the table and stretches it to the window frame. He ties the other end about his neck. He lets the first remaining tail piece hang down between his legs ... and now he stands upright there, he steps through his feet (about) so that his hands flesh behind his back ... and he carries one leg over ... apparently to get emotional.

This one I know, and well it were of such could know the name ... that many present that man had a bunch with bunch of them and bound with barn ... Corn should see how men their brothers mark ...

He stands ready to step off the table and die.

Jack, he sang, Midnigh ...  
My scrub ... he meant to cry as the lights  
go down ... FWD

## Alan Seymour in London

## Voice from the Dead

With bittersweet heart and deep abrogation I report from "bad, dead London" (Mike Morris, *Theatre Australia*, July '77) to confirm all your most anticipated suspense about the Old Dark. How dead is it to live in the cultural death?

Why, on consulting the work's Theatre Guide I find only 64 plays on at London this week. Only 14 plays from which to choose, how can I possibly survive in this "imperial" play? — With, on any given night, only 14 choices to make, including opera, ballet, orchestral and chamber concerts, rock concerts, pop concerts, modern dance and more?

I have not reported altogether, to add them to the list would only confuse us, especially as none there are not only amateur West End and suburban entertainers showing the latest flicks but four or five places devoted to vintage revivals or emulators of new (uncommercial/political/experimental) works!

Of the 14 stage shows on offer seven are Fringe or Alternative theatre and the remainder are West End or subsidised companies such as the RSC, the National or the Royal Court. How made quaint they are, as Mike Morris has severely perceived.

The RSC, with its two theatres in Stratford and two in Lambeth (the Aldwych and the Wardour) is clearly safe, secure business with a mere 24 plays on offer at the moment, from Shakespeare to new political plays by Howard Barker and C P Taylor and Edward Bond.

These critics and audiences who come yearly from all over the world are obviously fended by the Company's publicity and program. Unlike me, no-nonsense Mr Morris they write in naive conceptions of the essential range of writing, direction and acting values on offer from perhaps "the most accomplished and daring theatrical company in the world."

And the National is what Mr Morris, with that originality, calls as "place" building. Many others have been directed at that great edition but surely better to had thought of dubbing it, with a measure, a truly Australian economy of language, "rest". No cold-warrior Mr Morris can only sigh "Boring" about what goes on inside the building's three auditoria.

Well yes. After all, what can you say about a play (*Volpone*) which offers nothing better than Geddes, Schofield and Paul Rogers to do? On the usually unobtrusive response which can't offer anything fresher than a rather gruff hairy Aphrodisius in *Measure for Measure* (the stupid public will up initially night after

night to pack the theatre, aware that the rest sophisticates of the world are bored) a new of a Gwendoline Barker social drama *The Abashed* (which very far isn't a comedy and called, by the notoriously authoritarian London critics, wantonly impudent, tastelessly produced and deeply moving, a revival of Webster's *Trojan* Days with Peggy Ashcroft). It's highly charged study of the struggle for supremacy between Louis Trotsky and Stalin in *State of Revolution*, and the barely contemporary *Six in a Melting*, a dramatised documentary by young writer Shane Connor-Gough on the public controversy over teaching methods in a North London school which in the last year has helped to focus the issues in the ongoing debate on modern education.

How typically impotent of the once iconoclastic magazine *Time Out* to give "books, subjects and admirability" for the NT authorship who despite pressure from certain persons can not piece on:

The Royal Court? Mr Morris was kind to it although only since his departure from the land has that theatre pulled itself out of what was generally thought to be no state worse passed over.

The West End? His inscribed audience are audiences for their taste in repertory. The RSC's conventional seasons of *Willy* *Glass* and *Man and Superman* stand alone terribly, in that they share two shows plus to equally audiences almost every night. Stand! The West End used to be about stars. That explains why you can choose from Ralph Richardson, Celia Johnson, Evelyn Williams and Alastair Simms, but if they want them faithful following to turn up by god they'll all along new plays and not revivals of their old successes?

Oh, sorry, the public is turning up. Well, is one of the new plays to decidedly in the old style (*Douglas Henshall's* *The Benefactor*) or must it be to savor the last material glow of a style of acting now passing, and unlikely to be reborn. Guess, however, like Geddes in recent years, persons in playing fresher material of a more acrobatic kind.

Well, the English are an self-created mood and as playwrights such as Alan Bennett can have the criticism with India choly humour the public presumably goes to have its culture moulded and reflected but brutalized.

It is, of course, that the English must seem to produce theatre with the stability and surety of the best American

writing. Oh, at theatre always and necessarily, if sometimes unconsciously, presents the style as well as the preoccupation of its own society, is that to set for the impossible? Not quite.

The "bad, dead" London also produces, in its alternative theatres, the sprightly, robust, dynamic manner of the younger practitioners who at present seem to be working out some answers to the question I was asked in an earlier *Theatre Australia* as to whether the fringe was bringing up (you should gather the expression) as much original and lively material as it did in the first great surge of a fine playwright?

At the Bush Theatre (calculatedly) blends Science Fiction and political fantasy with genuine panache. Since Morris is his new play with Marlon Lake on the Krays, East End gangsters, an intense production which, however, has some thoughts, provocation and, rarely, passion there is contemporary Australian drama, fifth-square in a grand sweeping survey of the Australian legend. Harry Gantlett launching a three-month season of new American drama and the usual bludgeon of Brecht, Wall, Peter Brook, a new Barnet Eccles (last year's discovery, this year's most original new playwright and a right cabby-puncher in his tough, autobiographical studies of today's disillusioned working-class youth).

A relativist Brian Phelan enters again as "West" which takes apart bourgeoisie's dangerously inadequate response to the world's all-too-regular disaster-bellows, *Age* and *It's a Mad World*, two new pieces by a writer who made his play with a West End success and now writes the more personal pieces he has always wanted to, a non-nationalistic experimental *Misnomer* by Gilbert Raopson whose Eastern European company takes him right outside English provincialism, and, of course, Tom Stoppard's *What Light? Come* which begins as an Alternative offering but now qualifies, one supposes, as the "West End".

Yes, it's all very sad and dead, with new companies, new actors, new disciplines, new playwrights cropping up relatively weak by week, to burn us as they did Mike Morris. How sensible he found all of these new playwrights setting the *Hobson* on fire, lucky that. And how even more wise of him to return to that great source of theatrical vitality, *Punk*, *Western Australia*, except, of course, that it has managed to produce some talent in the past.

## Anne Fraser outlines some of the problems facing Australia's theatre designers

In 1953 I was appointed as the first Resident Designer for the Union Theatre Repertory Company, now the Melbourne Theatre Company and colleague, with my appointment to Australia's first professional repertory company, the only concern was to support the Australian designer himself.

Previously the only work available was with the major amateur companies and this was rare for less than money. Although their worth as a training ground was considerable and their standard of work on the whole, equal to much seen today.

The commercial theatres, which could best afford designers, preferred open new scenes were forced, so an original overseas design for their major productions and only the Victorian Ballet used local talent.

This situation successfully ruled out only two of our most talented designers, both so much world-standard, the late London Smith and Kenneth Howell, but no doubt talents there would have developed to similar standard had they not been defeated by lack of opportunity.

It is now nearly 20 years since that we are facing the loss of a whole generation of other designers in much the same way that we lost an older generation of actors, ruled by the same reasons.

With the establishment of the Australian Theatre Trust hope and opportunity were renewed. The Town Players were formed and so was the Town Opera,

both using Australian designers when necessary. Soon followed the Australian Studios. They too used Australian designers. However, these at the whole were expensive, including the 'noted' Kenneth Howell, or were well known friends of importance to Australians over the last.

With the development of more state drama companies and the state opera and ballet companies, certainly more work became available and these designers who had decided to stay working in Australia, and help develop a growing theatre began to see a hope of full-time employment and a chance to realize one's ambitions at home rather than abroad.

The National Institute of Dramatic Art established a design school to cope with the future needs of the industry and produced an average of four hopeful graduates each year. I have used the word *hope* excessively perhaps, but in fact it is wish the Australian designer looks on without hope, there would not be a theatre industry here at all!

There would be no more than eight permanent positions for designers at the whole of Australia, considerably less for design assistants. As an example, the Old Town Theatre Company mounted fifteen productions for 1977. Five were designed by resident designers, six by freelance designers, two of whom are from overseas. The same varies from company to company but it can be seen that the majority of productions at the major drama companies are designed by freelance

designers.

The future is not a well paid profession and designers are an exception. A senior resident designer's salary would probably equal the average wage. The freelance designer would find this difficult to attain and in some cases would find it almost impossible to equal the basic wage.

It has been calculated that \$1,000 for a production is considered generous and that anything from \$800 to \$1,000 quite usual. At the present, if a designer would need to exceed his production a year and at the latter, in terms of cost to equal the average wage. In addition, the freelance designer has no access to sickness pay, holiday pay or superannuation and must pay for all materials used in model making etc. It might also be stated that the lower fees paid by smaller companies are often expected to include putting the set at studio price.

Although in the major companies, actual manual work is not exploited, the detail involved in conception, preparation and production is time consuming and because of tight schedules in workshops, highly detailed models, working drawings, property designs and details and costume designs are required. This involves much work. The model itself can take anything from one to three weeks to make alone. Research, discussion and discussion are over and sometimes a remake is necessary if a director is not happy with the result.

Manufacturing time varies four to five

Anne Fraser, resident designer, Town Theatre Company. Photo: Robert Walker



weeks and a designer must be on call at all times to make spot decisions and attend to the many details. He may also have to spend nights or evenings and anything up to twelve weeks can be necessary to design, paint and oversee a production. Twelve weeks for a production equals four productions a year and to equal the average wage, a fee of \$2,500 would be necessary. This is rarely the case so a designer must find other means to supplement his income and often takes on more than one project at a time of available and obviously lowers his own standard by doing so.

This is unsatisfactory both from the designer's point of view and that of the management. Yet to reach the standard that we should now be experiencing, it is imperative that designers are given time and money to research, experiment and develop their ideas. It is consistently expressed that experts should be brought here to show us the way to new techniques and in some cases, the old ones also. Yet when a designer wants to use his originality and inventiveness in this way, or experiment with new materials (we all know they exist, we just need to find a repeated through lack of time and money).

The financial problem faced by drama companies is tremendous. The grants are not a Fisher's Box as thought by some and they rely heavily on their box office income. Wages are not likely to remain static, neither are basic, highly priced materials. Obviously design will be the area to suffer.

This is happening all over the world but it seems sad, that unlike Britain for instance, which has long since reached a high level of technical excellence and can afford to extract a fee, we on the other hand, may never have the opportunity to develop our skills to this point. We do not have the equivalent of Britain's National Theatre to a showcase and because of the very problem, however good our state can-

painters are, they can never reach this level.

The nearest equivalent, present-day are the full-time opera companies, but on the whole these are unavailable to our own designers. In a three year period ending in 1976, seven new production will have been mounted by the Australian Opera Company, seven of which will have been designed by Australian designers, ten by overseas designers, seven to ten — and too bad perhaps, on the surface, but in fact the latter ten productions repeat. These designers as in some cases both a costume and set designer are brought on this count.

It has been explained that the lack of Australian Opera directors has created this problem and of course one can only agree. It has also been explained that because overseas designers are brought here, they must be allowed to work with a designer of their choice and of course historically, one must agree with that also — up to a point. There are some who would ban overseas designers and directors altogether. This is nonsense. We can learn a great deal from them — if they are good. When they are not?

The Old Tote is bringing both director and designer from Tasmania for Gorky's *The Lower Depths*. I personally am very excited about this. Rarely do we have an opportunity to witness production from the part of the world.

In 1975 Mr Papua Cull was brought from the United States to direct *Makembo Brown-Eyes*. He brought set designer with him because of his limited stay but asked to use an Australian designer for costumes. Presently William Goldfarb from the U.S. was brought here to direct *Lover Labour Lost* and asked especially for an Australian designer and while this year, I worked with Hugh Hunt on *The Plough and the Stars* which was planned in London when I visited there last year. It is because

What is the answer then? Do we allow our designers to make themselves once again through illustrate and lack of opportunity? A law has been written recently about protecting our manufacturers from lower priced overseas imports and tariff applied to protect Australian employment. Should not designers have the same protection?

The Designer's Association in the performing arts has recently been re-formed after having slipped into oblivion in the past few years, because designers are concerned, for the future of our profession. One of our first considerations will be an act for the protection.

Perhaps then we more could be done to stimulate designers' work and development, not so much through overseas travel grants, although these are a continuing necessity, but perhaps in the case of artists that writers and parties are helped — to produce a work. Could not a designer and a theatre be given a separate grant to develop an area, possibly nominated by the designer, that otherwise could not be afforded? The use of programmes comes to mind as an area that is rarely used to drama companies because a lot of time is needed to plan and experiment long before the production is brought into the theatre. There no six months planning could be necessary in such a case with close cooperation between photographer, designer and lighting designer.

If it can be said by any section of the Australian Theatre that the Australian designer is not good enough or experienced enough, then we must do all in our power to make sure that this criticism can never be repeated.

I believe, that with some thought and liaison between management, designers and directors too, we can develop the take; we already have to a point where overseas designers are both unnecessary and unworkable.

NEDRA: studio at working



RONALD: rehearsal room - stage





## Focus off the National

The focal point of Australian operatic interest, almost — if not quite — switched away from the national company during September and October, as this year's major season at the Sydney Opera House treated off-miss Gilbert and Sullivan and a brilliant visiting opera director from Britain was responsible for some outstanding events of musical theatre both in Brisbane and Sydney.

Anthony Besch did a thoroughly satisfying double bill at the Sydney Conservatorium as well as a notable Mozart production for the Queensland Opera Company that was part of the most ambitious opera season staged by any of Australia's regional companies this year — a season which culminated in The Marriage of Figaro with Verdi's *I Promessi sposi* for a combined total of 11 performances just over a fortnight.

Yet nothing ought to be allowed to rob the last new production of the Australian Opera's winter repertory at the Sydney Opera House, Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* of the attention due to it. Of all the productions mounted in the 1977 major

season at the Sydney Opera House, new or old, this Dutchman was closest to its own top form on opening night — as much a personal triumph for that remarkably capable and versatile conductor, Carlo Felice Cesarini, as an excellent triumph for the company.

The two platoons of principals were very evenly matched indeed: Senta might even claim the "seconds" as a whole were better than the "firsts," though perhaps that is an overstatement.

In the title role Robert Allman was unusually impressive dramatically and sang near his best, but occasionally he had trouble coping with the higher reaches of the part, and cutting through the otherwise fluid of articulation. Raymond Myers found the role more comfortable in its range, though his voice is inherently less well-suited for Wagner, but could not convey quite so effectively the powerful, vaguely other-worldly dramatic presence the Dutchman requires.

As Senta, both Nancy Grant and Lore Koopal-Walter earned in the vocal performance all their respective careers. Grant

produces the most surprisingly beautiful Wagnerian sound, as she had already demonstrated as Elvira in the 1974 AD production of *Faustus*, but she also acted Senta with great conviction, apart from one highly unusual physical rough-and-tumble encounter with her Erik (Robert Donald) which was probably the responsibility of bad direction.

Koopal-Walter, who appeared in the part of the title character in Copenhagen a few years ago, warred more dramatically at times in the part, conveying superbly the same obsession Senta has with the Dutchman through his legend and portrait even before he appears in the flesh at all.

The long moment, during the depths of the second act, when she and Allman stood rooted to the spot, half a stage apart, as Balak housed and gabbled irrationally around them, was an outstanding piece of acting that thoroughly gripped the audience. And vocally she coped extremely well, for dramatically wide strata, maintaining far less in this sort of music than



*Flying Dutchman*  
R. Allman, N. Grant and A. Johnson

in just about anything else she has singing with the SO. It was particularly cruel and unfair in view of that, that a few bars marked her certain calls on opening night.

The two sopranos complemented each other, Rosalind Dowd turning in the more mannered vocal performance but being too mannered of appearance to be quite credible as Senta's earthbound lover, while Rihana Dennis sang the role to great effect though her sometimes seemed unsure of herself vocally.

The most truly authentically Wagnerian performance of the lot, though, was Donald Sparks' Falstaff — full-throated and towering, both vocally and physically, apart from Cio-Cio, he was the only one of the principals to make one to achieve and maintain consistently true Wagnerian vocal status. Wimpheling, though, he was a little too dramatically assertive. Neil Warren Smith captured the dramatic aspect of the role perfectly, though his sonorities lacked a measure of the enormous vocal power required to last a Wagnerian enthrall as full cry and third in audience at the present.

I am tempted to chide those about the new Australian Opera production of *The Flying Dutchman* given in the full knowledge that it is a fairly direct descendant, via the Royal Danish Opera, of Michael Wagner's original 1869 production in Bayreuth which he rechristened in Copenhagen two years later. For however old but such productions may be deemed, they are radical to Australian audiences

and this one has a good deal more interest than a mere repetition of the old, traditional, pre-war way of doing things — or of some of its details, probably.

Soren Freedberg's designs are starkly effective, some of the stage effects tremendous. Particularly brilliant were the appearance of the Dutchman's ship out of nowhere in the first act, its sails blood-red against the wintry sea, the Dutchman himself all but crucified against its masts, and, in Act II, the stark massiveness dimensionality that evoked Falstaff's house and the two-woman spring woods arranged in true phantasm, however problematic they may be.

Similarly, Peter Francis's direction — it was rare like choreography — was almost always effective, from the sailing of Act I carrying us ashore on a stationary dock to give the impression of a storm-tossed ship, to their great little cascade in Act III, though perhaps this was generated with a little too long and certainly it was not always as precise as it should have been. And the appearance of the giddy crew of the Dutchman's ship was handled superbly — as other worldly and delightfully effective as its visual impact as the unison movements of the female sailors were in evoking almost a womb to incarnate the grand spirit of Senta over the portrait of the Dutchman in Act II.

But the portrayal itself was kept high over the possibilities again in a totally improbable position, one of the few blunders

of this production of the Dutchman, even worse was the handling of the denouement, with Senta disappearing gracefully down the back-lit canopy which the Dutchman had popped up through the stage floor to Act II, and the Dutchman himself collapsing in the middle of the stage instead of being disfigured, and Senta's redemption once being suddenly cut so short the opera in a highly perfunctory and miserably unsatisfying manner.

The Australian conductor George Preelli, who took over from Cilliers for the last eight performances of the Dutchman, added the production even further once he had settled in, just as Verdi's Macbeth had improved under Cilliers when let loose over from John Prentiss earlier in the season.

Indeed Preelli's great contribution to this season came toward the end of August, when he conducted three performances of *Don Juan* acts which were perhaps better than the summer 1976 performances of this Leyden production it was all but unlistenable. By and large the singers were the same, but Preelli, a Magici spicciolo, got everything spot on this time round when it had been very more-or-less right before.

And the presence of the original director is to reinforce these few performances was clearly a contributing factor. His actual far-sightedness aspects were scarcely in the original, but it was even funnier in spots this time round due to some additional innovation by Copley and a whole new dimension had been added in

*Flying Dutchman* in Sydney  
Larsen (Dowd), Dennis (Wojciech), Garry Evans



the parricidal of the anguish that strikes all of the four lovers involved in Don Alfonso's desire home his original part) about the boldness and playfulness of affections — not only women's, of course, but men's as well.

In this respect, John Pringle's *Anglophile* and Jennifer Hornung's *Doubts* showed particular impressiveness; Rosalind Matherne's *Alfonso* was also much more natural and philosophical than the usual round.

It will, of course, be very ambitious indeed — some critics might even say foolhardy — for the QDC to attempt to present a joint season, at Bradbury's SGDID Theatre in September/October, of two of the best-known operas in the standard repertory, but the company acquitted itself very well as a whole, even if the strain did show disconcertingly now and then.

I rate the opening performance of *Trovatore* and the third one of *Faust*, so perhaps it was only to be expected that the *Faust* would have acquired some points, certainly, that seemed to be the case. But the most striking feature of both productions was the excellent sense of ensemble that somehow compensated to a large extent for the undeniable shortcomings in other areas.

By and large, the *Faust* principals rose admirably to the challenge of this most volatile and profound opera under Beach's direction. Of course they aren't capable of the depth of interpretation that has now anchored to the AGO's 1971 *Claudio Fiselli*,

after 40 years in the repertory almost without cast changes, but the basics are there and the framework would be set for the slow maturing artistic process of the QDC were able to recruit enough performers over enough time.

Perhaps it is a measure both of the strength of this production and the evolution of the ensemble that one cannot pick out outstanding individuals for special mention.

All that it requires to stage Verdi's *Trovatore*, it has been said ad nauseam, is the bare bones singers in the world, and if the QDC did not have nearly that, in September last, it had what was also implied by the backhanded statement that probably equally enough balanced to form an ensemble of satisfying proportions.

That Verdi's *warhorse* requires a large chorus and a degree of scene presence not implicit in *Faust* made it all but inevitable that the QDC would do less justice to it than to the *Messia*. Yet, at the end, it did remarkably well — due as much to the commanding impact of the brilliant singing of Peter Cooke and the sure-footed direction of John Thompson as to the merits of the solos.

Yasuf Bayagi, who had so impressed a few weeks earlier as Cavar in *Pushcari*, was a satisfyingly lyrical Montero. Paul Neal's more than adequate de Lura, Phyllis Bell a thoroughly enjoyable Leonora, and Margaret Russell a vocally pleasing Azucena, if somewhat too readily and distractingly youthful.

The most unexpectedly rewarding evening of this December period was the burlesque double bill at the Sydney Conservatorium of Shirley's *Shirley's Burlesque* and Jacques Dervet's frosty chansonnier bubble of a farce, *Anglophile*.

Without a doubt the major factor in the success of this evening was Anthony Beach, whose gate fixed on the hills was so off road a stroke, one overlook, vocal and stage differences that would otherwise have foisted unease in the way of one's enjoyment.

Apart from Ronald Dowd's immensely impressive *Diegues*, and to a considerably lesser extent, Kathleen Moon's *Jocasta*, the solists in the *Burlesque* were only adequate. The chart, though, was the and the overall effect just about stunning due to the combined impact of Beach's direction and the superbly conceived and — in particular — music designs.

*Anglophile*, a trivial farce of a piece in itself, met, oddly wholly on superb acting and characterization. Its musical shallowness had to be overlooked and transcended in performance.

But Maurice Wright's *Anglophile* — and the rest of supporting characters — obviously superbly drilled by Beach — swept with different objectives under the carpet more effectively in the Con production — as well as the equally valid, as paper, conception that such a "heavy" piece as *Diegues* doesn't really match well dramatically with such a piece of operetta-like farce from as *Anglophile*.

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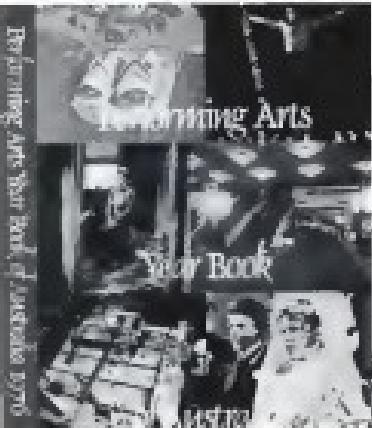
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## Australian Dance Theatre Dance Company (NSW)

When I first saw Christopher Bruce's *Weekend* in Adelaide it struck me as a clever interpretation of male/female role playing.

But, seeing it a third time in Melbourne it goes deeper than that, almost the deepest level of the seemingly impossible connection between men and women.

It still looks like an abstraction of a dirty weekend, with wife and husband swapping and all that, but those short scenes (which fall apart), those energetic and hours of energy that pack mark the works length, drag into a deeper psychological realm, a realm of shadowy problems of phantoms in the world.

*Weekend* is a tense, multi-layered work, it focuses back on the audience, it engages them because it speaks their language, it exists in some sort of collective heart of darkness.

This work, so seething from (illustrates the power that becomes apparent when a choreographer puts his heart and spirit into his creation, all the more striking when he does it in such a way as to take it out of the autobiographical and into the arena of common collective experience.

And yet, needless to say, this a fraction of that feeling which could come across if the dancers were damaged in their performance, but the five dances of the ADT led by the husband and wife team of John Stoen and Jon Soogood bring no much fabric muscularity and less intelligence to the work that it seems almost spontaneous, as if we were all recently watching a very private and intense personal situation.

It's the same sort of intensity that they bring to the stage. *Brand New*, choreographed by Soogood.

The great issues in question are those in the middle of the night when one or both partners wake up in a bit snarky and anxious thinking about the whole affair. Mortification, doubt, the desire for independence, yet longing for interdependence. The whole work filters through all the emotions inherent in a love affair blossoming at its early stages of an collapse, and there are a lot of realisations.

In its structure, so close to that of the original *Diez de Mayo* (first, male and female solo and final duet), it remembers a great deal of Glen Tetley's masterpiece *Island* along the same theme, *Never* over. However, Soogood's choice of music (a series of Scottish songs) didn't feel right. It seemed as if a huge gulf had been drawn between the image of the work and its background. The music was played and delicate, while the choreography was bold, violent even frenetic, but perhaps that

was the intention behind the choice, a lyric style on which a lightly strong, fierce tapistry was woven.

One also sensed a sort of some sort to give the work more presence. Hobson for Armantrout's set for *Remember* was a huge white disk that somehow became the architecture of the double bed, it was nicely tied to the image of the ballet, and gave it added impact.

But I would find no fault with Soogood's chosen group. He has for these funds delivered us the easier and every movement, especially those more cerebral and those that spring extremely out of the floor, take the audience deeper and deeper into an intense, internal drama.

One might think, from the above words that the Melbourne season will all stoppish and heavy statement. A lot of it was, but at least it was said well and powerfully. Now once did the ideas of the work overwhelm themselves to become mainly strident, posturing regions of something that could have been.

But as a reminder, there were Taylor's *Fever to the Moon* and *The Goodly Space*.

I had seen *Fever* in the Africa years ago when it was in the Rambert repertoire. It's simply a sort of dance at a gathering in a gym or in this case that somehow goes in as a regularly unique black baccarat way. Somebody in the gym periodically runs on the side, from it there comes one of those horrendous ABC hollies from voices telling them to walk, run, put hands on head etc. then it induces everyone to manifold themselves and feel things and the things that these grow-ups happen to feel would distract hardly the ABC.

It ends up with some of the dancers leaving the stage never to return and in one case, being cruelly tortured to death, all very macabre and moving.

I don't think Taylor purports to be "heavy" in that work, but it does say something about reification, about presenting themselves to be fed and about the unloving society we live in.

Far far and away the best thing by Taylor in the programme was *Brand New*. It was one of the greatest successes of Ballet Victoria and now Taylor has come to the Australian Dance Theatre.

The title could hint of two interpretations. One of the fading, drawing reification of a single person or "you" and the effect of that as a crowd of admirers, and with the dynamics of Parrot's Beckman's role one could easily see it as that.

The other, the one that seems to me more meaningful is the collapse of a world and time, of a star in the solar suns

By virtue of those flexed curves and groupings that splatter out onto the stage only to stand and freeze again, it would seem that this is the image that repels the work forward, for who would not be transfixed and charmed at the existence of our own solar system shivering and collapsing in on itself?

On another level it could be seen as a purely abstract dance piece of the utmost electrifying and compelling intensity, but whatever may one see it, it opens itself up to incorporate all manner of interpretations.

Taylor has already, within the space of one month, produced a company of splendid, diverse and consistently excellent performers, all of whom I salute either you all working as a collective whole.

Even now their corporate identity is emerging through their "style" so different from that of the Ballet Company (NSW).

Unfortunately I won't be able to see them in the choreographic season in the Space in November, where they will present works by their own choreographers, but I am looking forward to seeing them at the new Festival of Arts, where they'll have their own season as well as appearing in Tippett's *Mahagonny*. If all goes well and they do get to Sydney it will be a welcome chance for Sydney audiences to compare and contrast them with the Dance Company (NSW).

Gemma Murphy, as a choreographer is going from strength to strength. Her latest work, *For Earth's Sake*, which was in the last season for 1977 in the Opera House, is her best work to date.

Six to the surprise John Trenerry wrote, (Cambridge Repertory) it is a series of solo for four women based upon the names "Spiritus" of the four elements and, by extension the four temperaments.

The choreographic language is straightforward and firmly observed and it effectively repairs undirected criticism.

It has the most fascinating, lyrical quality, sending the limbs out in sharp and wider spirals. While watching it, I was convinced not only of the four elements and temperaments, but the four levels of the physical bodies according to the dimensions of Venutus and the four states of the soul on the path to illumination as described by St Bonaventure. It may seem finished, but the move with individual unique and modest qualities and the huge white canopy that dominates the stage, not to mention the superb lighting fixture not only unites movement but a sublime calm.

Every quality of the four dances (Jas-



## Journey Among Women Listen to the Lion



Helen Salter's *Listen to the Lion* was made before its successful Stateside run, and it is an entirely different story. When *States of Bliss* is open, optimistic, a dream of natural beauty, *Listen to the Lion* is set in a cramped urban hell — a grimy rubbish tip, a ramshackle hotel bar where the deadly intent to get drunk at 2am is possible. It is a diary of three days of a wife, as it happens, the final three days. The doctor, known as Hunter, rises up her morning from the garbage dump like a sorceress that somebody has toppled and thrown on an easel, and strides into the day, carrying a paper parcel of possessions. He meets tattered old shacks, one of them a woman with a cold cooking laugh, in a world where they share a basic distinguishment, that they never expected makes through.

They scatter, ploughing into the darkness. Hunter finds her sister, washed in darkness, is beaten up by Clockwork Orange thugs, is helped to a night shelter by another doctor. He is taken in reluctantly by the waitress, who can smell death. And of course he is right. Hunter resists all temptation, and so does the film, but with no dramatic or too-powerful theme of self-destruction.

Hunter is superbly played by Wyn Roberts. Barry Lovett has a role as a contemptuous barfly, Syd Hargreaves is the barman who believes Hunter, and John Devane appears as an youngster, a very garru-

### logue.

*Listen to the Lion* was made with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission (as was *Journey Among Women*) Helen Salter, who has directed feature films and television programs in France and Britain as well as in Australia, and whose credits have appeared on many popular UK screens (*The Troubadour*, *North/Sybil* for the BBC and for others made by Weekend Television, ATV and Harlech) is now living in Australia again and intends to stay as long as he can make films.

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It's a pity about *Journey Among Women*. Here is a film made so sloppily, with such clumsiness, lack of discipline and sheer laziness, with such a lot of what isn't only to be called off-beat, that a good idea is simply thrown away.

And it was a good idea. Here are these exotic Indian with their hair in tangles, their breasts falling out of their bodies, a bottle, when available, to their lips, sexual objects for a raunchy little argument, a his-

ts tokyo captain and the odd soldier, aged until further notice in the care of the garage.

And here is Elizabeth, the pregnant-adolescent daughter in dissolved status, or something equally exquisitely elegant, worn in the doctor (Hunt) and the cap (as). She is her daddy's pride and joy. And here is her man-capped husband, whose name is the predicate, barely pregnant by the captain.

One day the worst break out, flattening the soldier with home-made weapons, and take to the bars accompanied by Elizabeth. Her Doctor's wife swiftly becomes tattered, but it is her spirit that is really in shreds because she has surprised the captain in Japanese delirium, and looking a bit of a fool crashing about on the road floor while the women cheer him along.

The garrotte is cleaved to the doctor's scapulae, who for their part indulge in over-rocks and through screams hungry, used frightened but elated. They are in a pretty bad way when they encounter a couple of men whom in any other context would be thought of as gypsies, but who are probably bunghees.

As they ride on after the other düşper rats the tends lassively onto the expansive landscape, enormous skyscapes of Causa Creek, in NSW, curiously photographed by Tom Coxon, who also directed and

wrote the screenplay with Dorothy Howell and John Wedgwood, and would be his stock to cinematography; they form twin and foiled and quashed and make love and become ever blingier, more sex-faced and droll.

One morning while they sleep a black girl appears out of her own particular dimensions and shows them how to make a fire. She joins the troupe. Why she is, or her own without tribe or dillybag is not explained.

She is a charming, boldish girl who wants to help. But she and she who catches the kangaroo for dinner. A whig get down that.

The women being so mild, the girls are soon out of their gear and sit the trees. No Apartheid still, but a really ridiculous and same dog paddling. They eat their food, clean their faces with paint, wear leather and animal skins, carry spears, defy the passing soldiers, catch fish, and lose one of their number, little did, addressed Emily, to the sexual savagery of the bushwhackers.

Elizabeth keeps, and is kept, somewhat apart from the rest. One day the captain comes up on his horse and meets her at the emergence from a dip in the river, head on, full frontal.

"Elizabeth", he says. She does not respond.

"Elizabeth, you're sick."

He takes off his shirt, she puts it on, mounts the horse, and rides into the distance.

Later he brings up the soldier and a gun and blows bats of the forest and some of the girls.

His men and comes, speedily and spectacularly. In the confusion I'm not quite sure what happened to the girls.

The screenplay is absolutely awful, and the plot full of holes. I put the impression that there was not a firm hand on the production, and that much of the dialogue was improvised. It was not only badly written but poorly delivered. Judy Kancig has some control over her specimen as a gang leader, and Teri Elliott comes over her, but that's about it. The captain is a hideous figure, played wully by Martin Porras.

The ingénue Elizabeth is played by Anna Provalova, who did not manage to make her a sympathetic figure, or a believable one.

Despite its enormous potential, and the assurance that Tom Courtenay's cinematography at least would make the film worth seeing, the news about *Journey Among Women* was never good. Because it was to be made from a strongly feminist viewpoint it needed dollars, shrapnel, form, none of which it has.

All the session I attended people laughed out loud, and they were not wrong. But it may yet audience, for the sexual compositions of a group of suddenly liberated women making their own lives take shape away from the conventions of society, even prison society, and the R. certificate may encourage young audiences.

## Roundup from



## Australian Centre, International Theatre Institute

The ITI proposes to collaborate with UNESCO in holding a workshop conference on the social role of theatre and its mission in present day society in Nigeria, Spring, 1978.

Next year is also the ITI's 20th birthday and a big international event has been proposed for all international theatrical organisations, associated with the ITI to join together in celebration.

From next year on, Messages to celebrate World Theatre Day on March 27th will no longer be written by an international celebrity but instead by a theatre personality in each member's country and these particularly memorable ones may subsequently be published by the Secretariat of the ITI in Paris.

The ITI will co-operate with UNESCO in a meeting planned from 18th-20th June 1978, in Paris, to deal with the promotion and protection of the performing arts in Africa and Asia.

The 1978 Congress is to be held in Silla, Bulgaria and the East Germany ITI has registered its wish to host the 1983 Congress. Related news to Australia is that the New Theatre Committee has arranged that the ITI hold its 1981 Congress somewhere in Asia.

### Dance Committee Events

*Women's Power — March 1978* — in connection with the 8th International Festival of Traditional Art, the Dance Committee will continue its examination of the situation of traditional folk dance and health United States — Summer 1978 — A meeting is planned in connection with the Connecticut College Festival of Dance. *India 1979 — International seminar in Indian Classical Dance in Bombay*

*Israel 1979 — An international seminar on the subject of Biblical Themes in Dance Through the Ages*

*Poland 1979 — Jazz Dance Seminar to be conducted by Peter Geroe of the USA*

### Music Theatre Committee Events

*Stockholm Nordics June 1978 — 3rd Summer Course, Music Theatre Training — Interdisciplinary Working Meeting for singer, dancer and actor*

*Colmar France, Summer or Autumn 1978 — Auditor/Workshop for singer, instrumentalists and composers*

*East Germany — Winter 78/January 79 — Michael Wagner Colloquium — theoretical and practical problems linked with the organisation of Wagner's works on the contemporary opera stage*

*Brno/Czechoslovakia — International Meeting of Young Interpretants — Part I: Saturation — October 13-15 1978*

*Part II: Presentation of scholars and Narration of lectures October 1978*

*Denmark, Copenhagen — July/August 1979 — Music Theatre and Cities — Symposium on cultural demands and expectations*

*Japan, Tokyo, Spring or summer 1979 — International meeting of semi-independent music theatre groups aiming for a new reorganisation of theatre and contemporary music (performances and collections)*

### Social drama and social action

The first world Workshop on Social Action and Community Theatre is to be held in Israel, April 25-29, 1978. Registration is invited as soon as possible, addressed to the Organizing Committee, P.O. Box 940, Jerusalem.

### Theatre in Britain

*PARVO Increases and Summer Seminars for English-speaking academics, advanced students and those with a special interest in the theatre, will take place in London, July 2-29, 1978. Accommodation is available but the closing date for applications is 31 December 1977. PARVO c/o The Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchange, 43 Dorset Street, London W1H 3EY.*

### Australia to hold ITI Congress?

At the 1976 Statutory ITI Congress in Stockholm earlier this year, a recommendation by the New Theatre Committee urged the ITI "to hold an ITI Congress in Australia".

As a near geographical neighbour of Asia we are really interested in initiating co-operation between centres in our region, as well as with other existing centres in Latin America, Africa and the Arab world.

The Australian ITI Centre has therefore declined its invitation to the Secretary General of ITI at UNESCO headquarters in Paris of offering to host the 1978 ITI Congress in 1981 in Australia. We await the ITI Executive Committee's reaction to our proposal with great interest.



## The Year's Best on Records



This is not a systematic survey but a quick glance back over the year to see which records have appealed to me particularly. The only other criterion of those I have applied is that it is to try to imagine whether they would make satisfying presents and whether the people who buy or receive them are likely to gain listening to them for sometime.

My first choice past weeks is from the end of 1976 the complete recording, the first complete recording I may say, of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, brilliantly played and nobly sung under the direction of Lorin Maazel on three well-filled discs (Decca 5027 809-1).

Anyone who still thinks of *Porgy and Bess* as a vulgar kind of musical or at least undesirable entity known as a folk opera will have such ideas swept out of his mind by the revelation, quite remarkable on these discs, that *Porgy and Bess* is simply an opera, a very fine opera indeed in my opinion, and Gershwin's techniques of the sustained composition necessary to knit the numbers of an opera together into a convincing whole is shown to be entirely adequate in itself.

There are better individual performances of this at that song on some of the earlier, heavily cut versions of this masterpiece, but none of them need be considered

seriously in opposition to this Decca recording if the listener wants to experience the work as a whole.

There are always people newly discovering the series of complete Bach Cantata recordings presented magnificently on us tape under the Teldec label. The vocal recordings are being shared among forces directed either by Nikolaus Harnoncourt or Gustav Leonhardt. Each volume is a boxed set of two discs, usually (but not always) containing four separate Cantatas. The performances use the voices that were available to Bach when he wrote the Cantatas (mostly voices, that is, with all the soloing by other boys or men), and all the instruments employed either survive from Bach's period or their original state or are faithful copies of the surviving instruments of the period. In other words, we hear voices strong with girl singing and with the physical properties of the instruments such as Bach's time, eighteenth century ones, flutes and recorders, harps, trumpets, kettle drums and so on.

This is not a matter of antiquarianism. The instruments are well and professionally played, and they reveal themselves on these recordings as having a character, a presence as a self-contained appeal which fits the music better in terms of style and balance and which is fresh and appealing in its own right.

My experience has been — and I know it has been shared by thousands of other people — that listening to these records, even if at something of a surprise at first, speedily induces in the listener an engagement with any other kind of recorded performance of these works. The basses are beautifully performed, with copious notes on the basso, complete texts and translations and names of bassos, a reduced facsimile of the complete score (now easily taken from the New Bach Edition Volumes 12, 13 and 14) of this series being appended here in the last twelve months (Telephonics 8 33305, 8 33306 and 8 33307 — each serial number running for two discs). Any one of these volumes is thoroughly recommended. If I had to make an agonising choice between them, I might, for various reasons settle on Volume 16 (8 33309).

In spite this has been a rewarding and varied year I have no hope of listing all the interesting eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century operas that have entered the recording catalogues this year, some of them for the first time.

On technical grounds my first placing would go to the complete *Passacaglia* conducted by Cyle Davis (Philips 6700) for recording. Davis is not the most obvious choice for this role, but she and Davis prove that she is an asset in the part, with qualities in her singing not quite

matched by any recording. The rest of the cast is strong and the playing of the Covent Garden Orchestra is superb. Dene's conducting is exuberantly dynamic, but the glowing glory of the set is the sheer sound it gives off. This is an outstanding piece of recording and would certainly figure on my short list of the outstanding technical achievements of the year.

There were two highly commendable new complete recordings of Verdi's *Mâchsach*, one on Philips and one on HMV. Either of these sets would be acceptable as a listening companion for a long period. My decisive preference, however, is for the HMV set conducted by Riccardo Muti and with Pierino Cossotto absolutely outstanding, notwithstanding I would say, at the role of Lady Mâchsach. One of the signs of the set is that the Ambrosian Chorus, a studio group in London, actually do far better with the chorus and make them sound much more theatrically moving than their La Scala counterparts in the Philips version. The reference number of the HMV set is SLS 902 (three discs).

For really early Verdi the series of recordings produced by Philips deserves the strongest recommendation. Among the sets that have come my way in the last year those of Verdi's *I Masnadieri* (Philips 8700 064, three discs), which is based on Schiller's *The Robbers*, *Le Giurie* di Reggio (Philips 8701 012, three discs) and *M Corteo, Founded on Byron's The Corsair* (Philips 8701 058, three discs), stand out. *Le Giurie* di Reggio is Verdi's very first tragic opera and the only serious opera he wrote before his final masterpiece, *Falstaff*. Its搬演 is obviously in Rossini and Donizetti's idiom and it has tended to be written off as the last effort of an ageing tyke when it was first presented. In fact, it seems a thoroughly delightful work.

Although we may not associate Verdi in that stage of his career with lightness of touch or with any feeling for comic relief it is quite clear that he had thoroughly mastered the rhythmic and style of comic aspects of the period, and this operates throughout all the story of a man who is long for a day while justifies its absent in society. Lorenzo Ghielmi is the admirable Italian conductor who seems to have overall charge of the Philips series of early Verdi recordings.

In the category of song recitals there are, I think, two outstanding issues: a solo recital of Rossini and Mozart song by the young American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade with an especially sympathetic partnering from the Royal Danish Philharmonic conducted by Edo de Waart (Philips 8200 011) and the complete series of the London recordings made by Nellie Melba between the early years of the century and the late 1920s (EMI PLS 719, five discs).

The Melba recordings include alternative takes, some of which were never actually issued, and the set makes it possible

to hear most of Melba's bassoon performances in La Bohème than has been possible up to now. The Melba set is indispensable if you want to study the art of that great singer in close range. Frederika von Stade's disc is at least partial compensation that she of late singing is not becoming a thing of the past.

A disc of more specialised interest but rewarding singing of authentic verismo is Carlo Amorosi, tenor by Pini, Caccini and their contemporaries in the great age of madrigal singing by Nigel Rogers (BGO 2200 201). Roger's mastery of embellishment and the delightfully varied declining tones which accompany this remarkable tenor make this a disc of the most delicious of refreshment and satisfaction.

Overwhelmingly the year has been one of tasting from my point of view. There has been a worthwhile Beethoven series from Berlin and the Chicago Orchestra on Decca, and a splendid Siberian series conducted by Colin Davis on Philips, is now in progress. A single disc which served me to wild enthusiasm and which has inspired me to continue in less hagiographic vein Carlos Kleiber's recording with the Vienna Philharmonic of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony (ECC 210 701), which has been already reviewed in these columns.

Among concertos I can recommend the *Brahms First Piano Concerto* performed

by Roger Woodhead with the New Philharmonic conducted by Kurt Masur (RCA RL 7500) and the coupling of Brahms' *First and Third Piano Concertos* performed by Stephen Bishop (now usually known as Stephen Bishop-Bornemisza) and the London Symphony conducted by Dene (Philips 9200 029).

There were several good discs of Indian music. Among these I would like to mention Lambert's arrangement of Meyerbeer under the title of *La Passione* with a series of excerpts from the belcanto in Meyerbeer operas as performed by the National Philharmonic conducted by Richard Bonynge (Decca SXL 6012). This disc carries its special glorification not only for the high quality of the playing but also because of its unusually good sound.

Among chamber music recordings I restrict myself to two especially distinctive ones: the complete Beethoven *Sonata Quartets*, as performed by the Quartetto Italiano in what I am sure amounts to the most unfatiguing combination of performance and recording available, averaged over the works as a whole (Philips 8247 223, see also Astor Schmid and the Guarneri Quartet) each perhaps in even higher plane of collective accomplishment than the *Beethoven Chamber Music for Piano and Strings* and the Schumann Piano Quartet (RCA 4-SXL 30200) mentioned.

## AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

### Theatre Board Grants DANCE, DRAMA, PUPPETRY, MIME

The Third Sector has funding funds available for developing, producing, touring projects - musical and professional in 1978.

#### Professional Projects

Funding for professional companies or groups are invited to apply for grants for special projects, particularly for touring or for community involvement.

#### Touring Projects

Professional theatre companies are invited to apply for assistance in the implementation of plans for advanced touring programmes within Australia. Priority will be given to programmes providing access to regional communities (provincial, rural, semi-rural) for whom no resources are available to enable local governments to assist companies for work in their areas. Applications for grants for touring projects within Australia must be submitted by 1 January 1978. Total grant available for implementing programmes — \$1 million (\$100,000 for each state/territory).

#### Drama, Dance, Theatre Companies (the entrepreneurial)

##### Grants

Applications are invited from projects at present unable to be able to qualify for supplementary funding due to the nature of their activities in the theatre disciplines. Applications must present a well planned course of production work in the theatre for the development of disciplines or techniques. Applications for grants will be accepted from organisations which have the potential to contribute significantly to the field of contemporary theatre, especially in developing and presenting new works. Applications are expected to make their own arrangements for working with companies and to detail plans for implementing their proposed work programme. The Theatre Board may be able to offer assistance and advice in compiling a programme.

Only firms or organisations are available to seek a maximum for my own acknowledgement of \$10,000 for a twelve month programme. This sum includes a payment on lodgment. The amount will vary with the project. It is intended that the length of time involved will be dependent upon the application and take up applications from June 1978.

Applications for any of the above grants or acknowledgements must be submitted on the prescribed form which can be obtained by writing to:

The Australian Theatre Board, Australia Council,  
PO Box 1000, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000.  
Tel: (03) 662 1000.

The closing date is 15th February, 1978.  
Decisions will be made by 30th April, 1978.

# SPOTLIGHT



## Ron Blair

### Interviewed by Tony Baker

Playwright Ron Blair was appointed associate artistic director of the South Australian Theatre Company last year.

Born in 1942, Mr Blair first became involved with theatre in his student days at Sydney University. He helped create the original Normal Space in Darlinghurst and was co-author of Norman's first production, *Apples*. He is also the author of *Flash Jim Poco*, *Precious House or Party*, *Chances Arekere* and *Mad Dog and Dangerous To Know*. One of Australia's leading playwrights, he worked for the ABC until his appointment with the SATC.

Conversations with him for *Theatre Australia* began in his small office on the boards of The Playhouse in the Festival Centre where he was preparing his first production for the company. Blair speaks with an experienced broadcaster's precision and courtesy but had to compete with the high drama, and detailed level, of a per-

formance of *Murder* being staged from the stage above. We then moved in the corridor outside the theatre and shared a bottle of red wine with a友ing of the festival and the very current Adelaidie Civil. It was, in fact, all very Adelaidie. What were your impressions of Adelaidie?

An extremely pleasant city. I was here in 1970, then again for the Adelaide Festival last year with the ABC and I was here earlier this year to work as the assistant to Robert for *Scandal* (John Gough's first SATC production). That was really a business on both sides. At that time the possibility was that I would leave the ABC for a year, without pay. At that point I have left the ABC permanently. Their offer was such that I could not get a pay-off. So I resigned.

I have not had one sense of regret staying at the ABC... Well, it can make children of adults. A long time at the ABC and that's the way it happens and the SATC too!, how are you finding that?

I like it! Of course I like dramatic director Colby George. We got an extremely well. He is a very intelligent, energetic man. He never gets depressed, a very tolerant man, very hard working. I would

not come and work with someone I only partially respected because there is total involvement here, from now in the morning and sometimes until eleven at night. It has been like winning a scholarship because it is years since I worked in the theatre in a professional way.

I have written plays, helped build the Normal, but as a director I haven't worked on the stage since university days. The whole thing about moving actors around a stage was slightly daunting. But I have booked that and I am not now at all worried by that. If the Australian Council had sent me to England to work with a company, it might have been a lot worse than coming to Adelaidie.

When you were last here you were critical of The Playhouse. Are you still?

Well, I have mellowed a bit. I do not think it is a disaster. It has shortcomings. The gallery is not enjoyable to sit in. I still don't like the boxes. There are faults. What about the stage area?

Well the stage is still a shell. It is not as flexible as the people that built it pretend it to be. It is not as flexible as it should be and the cost of the complex?

Well I think the Festival Theatre is very good indeed. I like the complex a lot. I like walking about it.

I think it is more successful than the Sydney Opera House as a complex because you are aware of other things going on. At the Opera House, and you want to get a cup or something like that, you are not aware of them. There is no awareness in Sydney of an overall strategy.

How do you see yourself now as playwright turned director, at barely a playwright's age?

Fortunately I was a playwright before I was a director that I directed before I wrote a play. It's true that there are too many plays that make good directors. I'll say Stein and Brecht, but I understand that I am not putting myself in that lineage. I am well aware that the combination is a very one. I can't fit in to comment on my own capacity. I hope to flesh You're and write?

You have this writer I have just finished a play which will be performed hopefully next year. It's called *Moby and I*. I have been working on it. I began it since 1973. I am drawn to historical characters. Moby is an imaginative creation, it is not a scholarly work.

It is not like the Bryan piece, *Moby and Mongoose*. In *Moby*, a continuous editing of letters for an actor to perform, a literary exercise.

The *Moby* play is about the growing emotional and sexual pressures on a man who has a destiny. It is about Moby in London, in 1850 living in seclusion with his wife and their servant and at the same time preparing for *Zarzuela*.

I suppose looking at the play I was the things that were to pay up again and again are observational ones. It's a style that seems to find its application in humour and intensity and the heightened, I hope, of the intensity through humour.

I don't deny that I am ambitious as a playwright. But my ambition is not necessarily to have a huge popular success. That would be pleasing, of course, but I pursue my own dreams.

When you came here, much was made of the fact that you are an Australian South Australian and had had a spate of non-Australian appointments on the way, just looking at what you write you seem for somebody who has been introduced to the Australian cultural art world, not to be particularly concerned with nationalistic themes.

You are quite right. I am not preoccupied with them. They seem to be covered very well by other playwrights. I think David Williamson, Alex Bass and others cover them very well. I would be most trying and difficult there.

How do you think the ATC compares with the other State-supported companies?

Well I think good theatre is a balanced body come from a balanced director. I stress because I think that that is why Sydney theatre has suffered. There is no directorial leadership. There is no house style. It's the Old Tote I am talking about. Of course, National does not have a hankering disease and does very well so

you can hold that up as the example. But I think a theatre should have a house style. You see, whatever you can say about Peter Hall, and let it go on, after enough, he has thought through the kind of theatre he wants. I think the Old Tote has not, though, I think I have not seen enough of their productions but a consistency for the seasons of the ATC.

Another thing people accuse the SATC of "playing it safe", of being rather conservative. They are not the people responsible for fitting that theatre night after night with 800 people. If you put on something controversial — and I didn't say that in a positive sense — you might get praise, but you would also get a massive overkill. It is a difficult line to tread.

That is why I think Adelelaide, as everyone seems to do, needs an alternative theatre. I think to succeed, if not as very extensive, can be found in the Red Shell in August every day, which seats about 50 or so. I assume that there is an intelligent leadership with an intelligent policy. It was and here now now ago that Her Majesty's in the city — now The Opera Theatre — should be a showcase for community theatre. Nothing seems to have happened. Would you favour such an approach? Could Adelelaide support it?

I don't know, sir. When you look at Sydney, the Old Tote begins to feel smallish in the middle of the University of New South Wales and it is running these huge theatres. But it begins in a small way. I think that to begin as an overambitious may not be correct direction.

Adelaide, again started in a small way. The ATC had years of scrapping around the university — I am not saying that scrapping is automatically good for the soul. I think the Red Shell could do with a few grand and get fixed up a bit. There is nothing wrong with seating 50 to 100. But to have a large theatre goes against the grain at the stage. It is a different kind of theatre.

We are not one more of isolation in Adelaide.

Well for the past three years I keep a isolation in Sydney, writing. You live or isolate if you want. Certainly my friends were only a phone call away and not a telephone a mile. But National were over here not long ago. The Festival is coming up. It does not bother me at all. I suppose for me vanishes with the opening of a book.

## Dallas Lewis

### Interviewed by Richard Mills

One of the more exciting new faces on the Sydney stage today is Dallas Lewis, currently playing Adelheid in Louis Couper's *Lower Depths* (Cooley) for the Old Tote in the Opera House. In the year since his "graduation" from the National's classes, Dallas has not been short of a job

. The twenty-six year old actor started at National classes with Richard Williamson in 1974. In September 1976, he replaced Dave Fongoh, who had to drop out of Ben Hovis' National production of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Illych*. From there, in what straight is a three month stint at the Bellairs and Coffey Theatre with John Hawes' *Norquay* work, and the young actor, who is paid off in due while many traditional theatre people looked down on the tolls, starting to record, it was valuable experience. Although there were no words, you're well up there, and you've got to create the character. It was a very fast show, and it taught a lot of condensation.

Dallas feels that *One Day in Ivan Illych* being short, for him, it gained him James Cameron as agent, and perhaps it was her efforts that brought the young actor to Raymond Chandler's notice. He was asked to audition for Chandler's *ATSP / Old Tote* *Archie's Last Stand*, and during December 1976 and January 1977 was rehearsing for the tour during the day, playing the title at night.

For nearly six months he toured with the Archie's group, who presented Chandler's *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Okello* to adults, several school plays and many workshops. Two days after his return to Sydney, Dallas was asked to replace John Bell, and within a week he was playing Claudio in March's *Actors' Studio* *Volpone*, for a three week season. In Adelelaide, on return to Sydney there was a week's collaboration of *Okello* with the Archie's cast at the NIDA Theatre. Not long after that he was asked to substitute for the *Lower Depths*.

The striking character and sensitivity of Dallas' features give him a "working performer" quality, rather than that of an actor acting. Add to this a natural sense of timing and an extremely strong dramatic presence, and the result is an exciting potential. His *Illych*, while somewhat diluted was always commanding and sometimes riveting.

Working with Cooley, he says, is stimulating. Cooley has produced *Lower Depths* in Rumania, West Germany and Washington. Dallas feels that the last is in getting together a production that already exists in his imagination, rather than a rereading a new one for a specific long run, but first the director is completeness about his own often stuck.

"I think (Cooley) is most coherent, due to everybody has been 'Don't colour the line'. When you just read the play, it comes off the page like a lot of other Russian plays which are seen by many Australians as intellectual and very deep and meaningful. What we often miss in Australia is the passion of it. It is amazing to watch Cooley at work. He is educating something he knows as well, and to act the way. You just can't do a line."

*Lower Depths* finishes on late December, and Dallas will be looking for work again — if it has not already found him. Dallas is the with the impression that he is supremely self-assured, knowing his own capabilities.



in stage workshop project, and knowing exactly where he wants to go as an actor.

"Sometimes you can just read a play and know exactly what you want to do with the part, it's just you. As often though, if you haven't got really in your mind what you want to do with it, I feel it is

better to get the technical stage, where you're going and what you're doing, out of the way first. To rehearse the play without annotation, or without being pushed in that line, until you're ready to hit it on cue. Some actors can begin to feel a part immediately but to give a 'performance' for every part on first reading is impossible."

Recently though when I heard out, I've always said — 'Never become a connoisseur of anything! It's one pit where you're certain to get your head chopped off!'

Who and what does William Akers, Associate Production Director and Lighting Designer for The Australian Ballet, consider? "Quite simple! The Building Committee employs an architect, Ray Grounds. He has a theatre consultant, Tom Brown in Sydney. For the dressing tank, the lady between the Building Committee — the client, and Ray Grounds and Tom Brown. It's all much more exciting than it sounds. I spend a lot of time at meetings, but they're interesting ones. I read a lot of plans. We spend hours checking them. There are still around 2000 more plans to check before the Centre is finished in 1990." Presently he sits, his eyes half-closed and adds, "God and the sun goes permitting."

"I'm involved in other aspects of the project too. I'm on the committee of the Performing Arts Museum which will be

part of the Centre and that is going to be marvellous. A museum would store and exhibit old furniture that is going to be a moving and alive one. We've got some magnificent designs for it already."

Bill is one of the most refined men one is ever likely to encounter, a marvellous raconteur, a gourmet cook, a connoisseur of fine wines, a collector of books and antique jewellery, and as a complete sophisticate. He can be taken to heights and depths, very often, as is should to carry up a rare sensitivity and periods of quiet depression. Always impeccably dressed and unfailingly courteous, he is one of the most skin, popular and best-known figures in the illustrious world of Australian theatre.

"I started off as an actor you know. I had a mere supervising part. It looked as though I would have to become another Harpo Marx. I had a nose so high it was almost spherical — the kind that drives dogs mad. It was discovered, at all the auditions that I had to be born without, that I was born without an uvula and nothing could be done about it. I enrolled at the Rambert Academy of Dramatic Art and they helped me there a great deal to overcome my high nose. Jean Sutherland was one of their pupils too. As a dramatic talent, she was even worse than I was."

Bill went on to join the John Akers Shakespeare Company, played in Garry Connell's production of *The King and I* and then joined J.C. Williamson's.

Just as Bill was due to start rehearsing for *Oscar* Charles his acting career came to an end. He was ordered by the Kydian Manager of JCW to go to Siberia and 'just help us out for a couple of months as Horowitzky's assistant stage manager'. Bill was appalled. "But I just loathe ballet," he groaned. "They are either 'Three days later he walked into Horowitzky's rehearsal' to be confronted by 35 ringing girls. I stayed with Horowitzky and then The Australian Ballet for 12 years and I joined the Arts Centre two years ago. My God! What I think of what I endured to become an actor I wonder how I let them do that to me!"

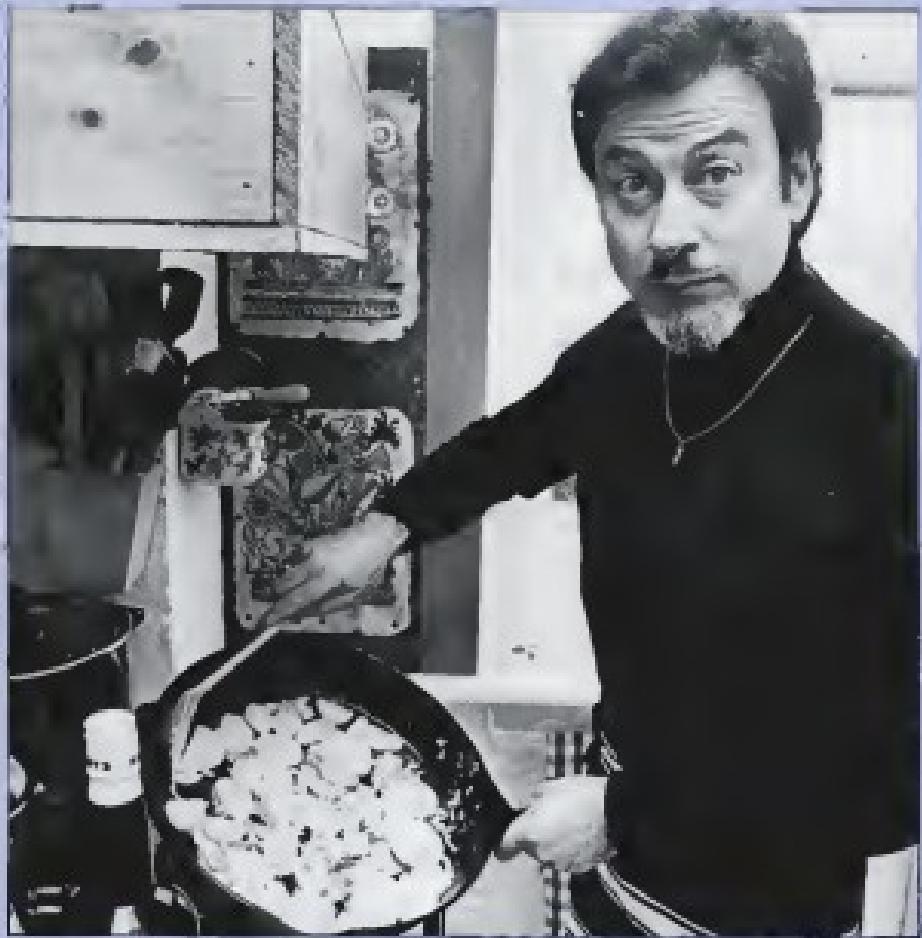
For all his sophistication, Bill is very Australian and very forthright. He taught Rose all the time. "I usually lost." Then when Peggy van Praagh came back to Australia to start The Australian Ballet in 1962, she invited Bill to join the company as Lighting Designer. "I'd been lighting all Horowitzky's productions so, I suppose, that's what she thought I was, so that's what I became. I fought with Peggy like, especially when I thought she was trying to make us a replica of the Royal Ballet and I'd howl 'that's not an Australian company'."

I will light quite a number of productions. I did the lighting for Jonathan Taylor's Australian Dance Theatre season at the Sydney Opera House earlier in the year. They are so good that it was a thrill for me to work with them. Also for the Diana Harrison tribute to Peggy van

## Bill Akers

Interviewed by  
Pamela Ruskin

"What exactly is your role these days Bill?" I ask, removing a cat or two from my lap. Looking a little sheepish he hangs me a card to read — WILLIAM AKERS, Technical Planning Co-ordinator and before that Victorian Arts Centre Building Committee. Before I can comment, he says, "When I took this on I thought I would just consult on any kind of fittings. I found the other anyway of becoming a Public Servant and 'officer' is the meaning of that. Anyway, as it's turned out a Statutory Body, some of us are Public Servants anyway. So when I left The Australian Ballet to join the Arts Centre, I said to myself, 'Bill! I wonder what sort of talk they've thought up for you? I



Poach, and I've done the lighting for Anna Woodhouse's new production of *Jesus Lake* which the Australian Ballet are doing. So I'm not out of touch, but my new job gives me a much wider range of interests. The ballet world is so specialised and I only notice that now.

Did I ever tell you about the lightning for Bobbie Helphanta's ballet *Snow Man*? He rang me up and said this bird guy had this marvellous idea of Peter Pan's lost boy and I must go and have a look because he was going to photograph a faerie for it. So off I went and knew and knew that and saw Bobbie a three page letter giving him my ideas on it.

He rang me up much later to discuss the lighting, say "Well, there's one movement I can only describe as 'underground green' and I said, 'Oh yes! 21 and 28'. They're two shades of lighting green."

Some time later we were both in China with the Australian Ballet, and we were taken to Angkor Wat and the Thommanon temple that's been excavated there. A marvellous place with 800 trees growing over the walls. Very eerie and magical.

Bobby sat down and produced a gold-tipped cigarette from his pocket case. After a while, the sun began to filter through those strange trees, very weirdly and wonderfully. "There you are!" says Bobbie exuberantly. "Underground Green", and I said joyfully, "Yes! 21 and 28!"

Anthony Tudor is a great choreographer but quite different. He's a Zen Buddhist — a very rare sort of man. He tries you out all the time and he always appears to be very serious. He doesn't do *Peter Pan* for the Coopers. When he started working on it, I used to ask "What colour socks do you feel

for this, Mr Tudor?", very irreverent and so on. "Always do pink ones and gold lace". I was so shocked I went to Peggy and said "I can't be a go-to-lady that. I mean he's a great man but it looks like Alice in Wonderland." Peggy said, "Calm down Bill! I'll go and talk to him", which was only brave of her because I think she was nearly as scared of him as I was. So off she went, and she came back saying that, marvellous smile of hers "Mr Tudor says you can do whatever you like. He was just trying to find out how much you know."

Ruth Nutting is the most diaphanous dancer to light for. I remember lighting this beautiful garden scene in *Raymonde* for her. Ruth came on and then stopped and glared at me. "Bobb", he yelled. "For Christ's sake! Can I, you give me some power?" I said patiently. "But Ruth, you

don't have park in a garden" and Ruth replied firmly, "I do! I want park! I always have park."

Ruthie in *Lillian's* proved an unforgettable experience for Mr William Alcorn in more ways than one. There was the big Arab called Mansapha in charge of the switchboard. A huge fellow. We were working with Act II of Swan Lake, perfectly beautiful in that open setting with the natural surroundings and all that. On the opening night, Fokine was dancing and I was tucked behind a curtain, calling the cues up to the switchboard "Mansapha", I called. "If you please, Right, I'll like you forever Right." Said by Cue 1. Cue 1! It worked like a dream. "Marvellous," I said. "Mansapha, I love you, stand by for Cue 2. Cue 1 go. Mansapha, I love you!" It was going beautifully. The doctors came on and Fokine danced from behind a rock opposite me and began the famous one-flapping movements of the swan. Then I called up to Mansapha, "Stand by for Cue 3. Cue 3 go". No answer. "Cue 3 go" and again absolutely nothing happened. So I called, "What the hell's going on up there? Cue 3 GO!" Silence! And then very suddenly, the rock dropped down. "You didn't say you love me!" cried Ruthie in whatever I forgot the "Mansapha, I love you!" — no light! My God!

In one respect, the Ballet Company's loss is theater's gain in terms of what the Victorian Arts Centre will mean to the whole theater trend and musical scene. On the other hand, it would be a great pity, if

Bill's stock of horrors should dry up in his new and less traumatic role, because his expertise in this area is certainly no loss to the more technical area of stage productions ad libbing.

## The Last Farewell

### Barry Eaton

The Kilkenny Mill Coffee Theatre season gets off to a head show. Sad but true. The theatre must close on the 15th of December because of new fire regulations that come into effect at the new year. Regulations that are impossible to meet for the old.

So the already sold-out pre-opening night on October 27th was a memorable night. The new show is a combination of new material plus a bit of old favorites

The last half went from country to country in a series of pleasant but relatively forgettable numbers and sketches.

Only in the second half, with the appearance of John Howell, did the show take off. A lovely Can Can sequence kicked things off — if you'll pardon the pun. Some refreshing sketches were — "My Wife the Doctor", a Lily Tomlin number, a great send up of babies with John Hoyt and Peter Parkinson and a mad Spike Jones piece.

But the audience really loved the old favorites — "My Drowning Worl", Come Back!, "Tableau" and a hilarious Howlin' Hootie.

Then there was the inevitable finale with "Nelle Lady". There are more favorites here than Nelle McHe could have dreamed about!

So this is it. The last farewell. Where is from here for the talented 680 people John wants to have a break early next year and will then look for alternative ways of presenting his shows. But with the proprietorship of the training school there, he has his work cut out transforming that into a multi-disciplinary establishment. Neither used by its long traditions nor familiar of its recent financial failure he chooses to keep its main stage for "straight" theater. Television is another idea that he would like to explore.

On behalf of the many fans of the 680 I wish him the best of luck. He deserves it. So do we.



# NB

## Editorial address

Theatre Australia has a new editorial address:  
80 Flaxton Street, Mayfield,  
NSW 2304, telephone (09) 62 4610

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There will be no January issue of *Theatre Australia*, but in the big February Survey issue there are roundups of the state of theatre, state by state, during 1977; Gordon Chater on *A Year of Benjamin Franklin*; Peter Holderness on *Theatre Photography*; Geoffrey Hutton on *The Star System*; Act One of *A Happy and Holy Occasion* and lots lots more.

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